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Sea Swallow

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Editor:
David Dobson,
Downgate Cottage, Steep Marsh,
Petersfield, Hants GU32 2BE.
Phone: 01730 261344
Email: editor@rnbws.org.uk

Secretary:
Lt Cdr Philip Boak RN
80 Upper Road,
Shrewsbury SY3 9JP.
Phone: 0044 7535 94687
Email: secretary@rnbws.org.uk

Hon. Treasurer:
Tony Tindale,
12 Longfield Avenue,
Fareham, Hants PO14 1DA.
Phone: 01329 319012
Email: treasurer@rnbws.org.uk

Seabird Records Coordinator:
Stephen Chapman,
Steeplefield, Marlpost Road,
Southwater, Horsham RH13 7BZ.
Phone: 07973 533968
Email: data@rnbws.org.uk

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Designed and typeset by:
Harry Scott (PicaDesign)
51 Charlton Crescent, Aboyne,
Aberdeenshire AB34 5GN.
Email: harry@picadesign.org.uk

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President: Vice Admiral Sir David Dobson KBE

Vice President: The Master, the Honourable Company of Master Mariners

Executive Committee:

Chairman: Rear Admiral Martin Alabaster CBE.
Email: chairman@rnbws.org.uk

Vice Chairman & Seabird Records Coordinator: Captain Stephen Chapman MN.
Email: data@rnbws.org.uk

Secretary: Lt Cdr Philip Boak RN.
Email: secretary@rnbws.org.uk

Field Trips Officer: CPO Mark Cutts.
Email: expeditions@rnbws.org.uk

Hon. Treasurer and Membership Secretary: Warrant Officer Tony Tindale.
Email: treasurer@rnbws.org.uk

Librarian: Warrant Officer Steve Copsey.
Email: librarian@rnbws.org.uk

Webmaster: Rear Admiral Martin Alabaster CBE.
Email: webmaster@rnbws.org.uk

Editor, *Sea Swallow*: David Dobson.
Email: editor@rnbws.org.uk

Web site: *www.rnbws.org.uk*

Aims and Activities:
The Society was formed in 1946 to provide a forum for the exchange of information on seabirds, and land birds at sea, by members for whom birdwatching is a spare time recreation and hobby. It also aims to coordinate the efforts of individual members using standardised recording methods so that observations can be of value to the professional ornithologist. In addition to the promotion of observations afloat, the RNBWS organises fieldwork and expeditions, often in cooperation with the Army and RAF Ornithological Societies.

The Royal Naval Birdwatching Society is the only organisation in the world which collects, collates and publishes data on seabirds and landbirds at sea. Membership is open to all those, regardless of nationality, who share a common interest in birds at sea. Instructions for joining can be found on the Society website www.rnbws.org.uk or by application to the Secretary.

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Material for publication in *Sea Swallow* should be sent to the editor. Ideally submissions should be in MS Word or rtf format, but other formats are acceptable. Graphics should be jpeg or tiff. Accompanying photographs sent electronically should always be the original camera files, and not cropped in any way. Contributions are welcome at any time, but if for inclusion in the next edition should reach the editor by 30 July.

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Chairman's foreword

by Rear Admiral Martin Alabaster

This volume reflects a welcome return to normal Society activity after several years affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. We are able to travel again and so members have been ringing with Mark Cutts in Gibraltar, helping Frank Zino in Madeira and birding across the world. Philip Boak's piece from Madeira is particularly notable for showing how night vision technology can be game changing for conservationists. If you haven't seen it already, do have a look at his Infra-Red footage of Zino's Petrels around Pico Arieiro on our social media.

More broadly though, whilst we have moved out from under the COVID-19 cloud, the world's bird populations have been hit hard by avian flu, and early this summer there was a special Simmer Dim expedition to Shetland, in support of the JNCC's 'Emergency Highly Pathogenic Avian Flu Seabird Monitoring Programme'. This was again RAFOS-led but with RNBWS and AOS participation, tasked with comparing survey results with those in 2019 and 21, and we await the next *Sea Swallow* for the full analysis.

On a more positive note, I am happy to report the recruitment of some new serving members, three of whom have already contributed their first articles to this issue. Thank you and welcome!

Meanwhile, it is good to see RNBWS reports from our reps around the world: a Cyprus seawatching article from Colin Richardson, once our man in the Gulf and still very active in retirement; an excellent survey of the Seychelles scene from Adrian Skerrett; and a report from our new RNBWS rep in the Falklands, retired Commander Chris Moorey, head of the civilian Maritime Authority there, whose last report for *Sea Swallow* was from Turkey as a serving officer.

I am sure that you will enjoy this volume of *Sea Swallow* with its range of interesting articles and excellent photographs. This is the 12th edition in the 'new' format and once again it demonstrates how far it has come to become a publication of which we can be really proud. Of course, this hasn't happened by accident, but by the vision, expertise and simple hard work of our Editor. I mention this, because this is David Dobson's last *Sea Swallow*. I know that all our members have greatly appreciated his efforts and savoured every volume; he will be a hard act to follow.

And – as they say – finally, after quite a few years in post, I should report that I too am soon to stand aside and this will be my last report as Chairman. I am delighted that we are able to skip a generation and so this 'boomer' is to be succeeded by Philip Boak, a 'millennial'. Phil is an accomplished birder and is making an impressive career as a warfare officer and hydrographer, which means he should have plenty of bridge time in interesting waters ahead of him. He is just the right person to lead us towards our centenary.

Martin Alabaster
Email: chairman@rnbws.org.uk

Conservation in the Desertas Islands of Madeira

by David Dobson

(All photographs by Frank Zino)

The conservation work by the Zino family in and around Madeira has been well documented in *Sea Swallow* over the years. We have Alec Zino (RNBWS member Frank's father) to thank for rediscovering, identifying and saving what came to be called Zino's Petrel *Pterodroma madeira,* and it was the Zino family that was largely responsible for the setting up of the Selvagens as a national nature reserve.

A third, lesser known, campaign has been the Zino family's work in the uninhabited and forbidding Desertas Islands, to the immediate south east of Madeira, and especially on the southernmost island, Bugio. Rising to about a thousand feet, it is the most hostile of the three islands, with steep and dangerous cliffs. However, it has two small plateaux, which are very important for nesting seabirds, but otherwise the central ridge of the island is like a knife. Access to the north plateau is very difficult without a helicopter and the conservation effort has been almost wholly on the southern plateau.

The main bird of interest on Bugio is a close relative of Zino's Petrel, the Desertas Petrel *Pterodroma deserta.* However, it was not birds that first took Frank and his father to the Desertas.

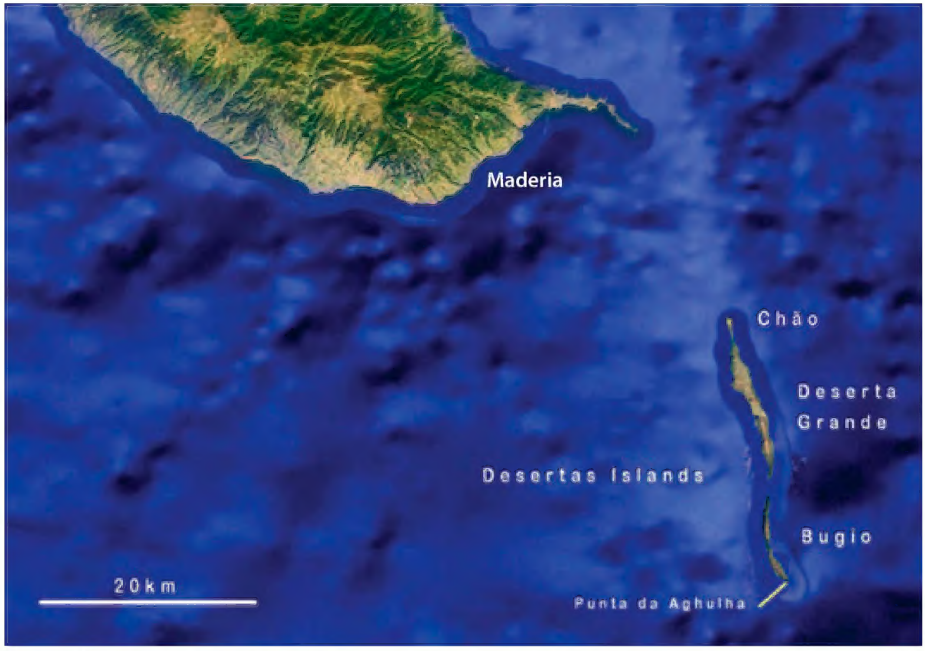

Figure 1. The Deserta Islands. © *Google Earth*

'The fishing there was fabulous and there were rabbits and goats to shoot. My father had a boat and my school holidays were spent on the sea. Each Friday I would go and do the shopping, put everything on board and regardless of the weather we would set off after he finished at the office. We had wonderful and very privileged times there. I first climbed to the top of Deserta Grande aged nine and crossed the Risco on a goat shooting expedition. The Risco was a long path across a knife edge about a thousand feet up; the knife edge was the result of major landslides on either side of the middle. The path was less than a metre wide, with an L-shape cut into the top of the knife, so the near-vertical drop was on only one side. Still pretty terrifying! In those days there was a team of three men ahead of us clearing the path; one removing major stones, the next clearing with a spade and the third sweeping the ground before we were ushered on!'

'It was the success of the 1963 Selvagens expedition that gave my father the impetus to visit the Desertas looking for birds. We already knew from the lighthouse men on the end of Bugio at Ponta da Agulha that *Pterodroma feae*, as it was then called, bred on the southern plateau of Bugio and so we started climbing there, with our Selvagens companions Christian Jouanin and Francis Roux. My father went up many times, often lugging up his heavy old Grundig tape recorder, and the recordings he made helped in the rediscovery and identification of Zino's Petrel. Indeed, I think these recordings were pretty vital, for he reasoned that as the birds (Zino's and Deserta) looked so similar that even Ernest Schmitz had considered them the same bird, then the calls should also be similar - as they are!'

'We also visited Deserta Grande, hoping to hear *Pterodroma deserta*, but we never did, though I did find two dead birds there, so we know they pass by and I am sure that there are a few nests there too.'

Plate 1. The view north from the southern plateau of Bugio, with Madeira in the distance.

Plate 2. Christian Jouanin and *Pterodroma deserta*, Bugio 1967.

Plate 3. Climbing to the southern plateau of Bugio in the 1980s.

Plate 4. Southern plateau of Bugio in the 1960s.

Plate 5. Walking south from the southern plateau in the 1960s. The path up the cliff, along the ridge and down to the lighthouse is somewhat hazardous. On the right is Frank's father Alec Zino.

Plate 6. An angry deserta chick.

Plate 7. Desertas Petrels.

'On Bugio the main focus has always been *P. deserta,* and I must have ringed at least 500 over the years. I also monitored the Storm-petrels there and the flora. The goats too were very interesting as they were possibly from a pre-hispanic Canarian race, all similar and completely different from the goats on Deserta Grande. Sadly, a few years ago the authorities, in trying to remove the rabbits and mice, managed to remove these goats as well.'

'In 1979 I returned to live in Madeira and from then on did regular trips to Bugio. Here, the biggest problem was transport to the island, and the main need once ashore was for good physical fitness to climb the cliffs - and a good head for heights! Then in 1981 HMS *Endurance* visited on the way south to the Falklands, and I persuaded the Captain, Nick Barker, that his Wasps would be ideal to take us to the top. This we did in fine conditions, and it was a very successful and great occasion. The helicopter also took me to the northern plateau, the first time I had been there.'

Plate 8. The southern plateau looking north, with Francesca Zino and in the background the huts.

This started a fabulous run of trips on choppers from the Royal Navy, on the basis of which I was able to go to the Portuguese Air Force and say that they were being left out and why not do exercises with a proper purpose such as dropping us off and collecting us? This they did with their Pumas and then when they got the EH101 Merlin, I persuaded the pilots to race to see who would land the first one on Bugio! Great fun was had by all, and I think that Bugio was considered a real challenge to land on because of downdraughts. Indeed, I think the pilots considered it the most difficult landing site in Portugal.'

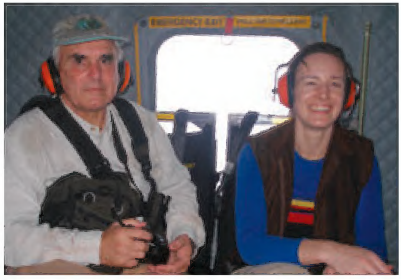

Plate 9. Frank Zino and daughter Francesca embarked in a Merlin of the Portuguese Air Force.

Plate 10. Merlin on the southern plateau - not much space for a large helicopter, with nests all around too.

Plate 11. Unloading the Merlin.

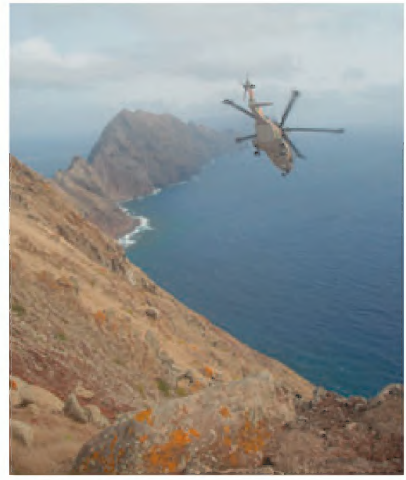

Plate 12. Merlin departure.

Plate 13. Endurance's Wasp on the southern plateau.

Plate 14. Frank Zino and Hadoram Shirihai.

'In 2009 I took Hadoram Shirihai and Vincente Bretagnolle there for three days in perfect weather and we ringed over 60 birds, each and every one photographed by Hadoram. This led to a further paper (our first, written by Jouanin, Roux and Alec Zino, had been published in 1969) and we had enough blood samples to do the DNAs and another paper on Nuclear DNA.'

'I like to think that we were the ones who got things going, though it has to be admitted that the Bugio birds were never in real danger as the island is so remote and access so difficult that human predation is unlikely, and in any case a *Pterodroma* chick is so small it is not worth taking at the time one would harvest Cory's *Calonectris borealis* chicks.'

Plate 15. Night work; Frank Zino and wife Buffy.

'In 1990 the Desertas became a nature reserve, with the main aim the protection not only of birds but above all a small colony of Monk Seals *Monachus monachus,* where numbers were dangerously low. It is pleasing to report that this population is now stable and growing slowly. Responsibility for the Desertas that year passed to the Parque Natural da Madeira (PNM), which subsequently merged with the Forestry to become the Instituto das Floresta e Conservação da Naturesa (IFCN).'

Frank's vivid testimony above is rather modest about what he and his family

achieved over a period of about forty five years. During that time the Zinos made a great many visits to Bugio, each one meticulously recorded and the details forwarded to the authorities in Madeira. Here is just one of those reports:

Studies carried out on Bugio from 30 August–2 September 1991 by Frank Zino, Ted Gerrard, Elizabeth Zino, Alexander Zino, Francesca Zino and Ricardo Franquinho and Izamberto Silva of the PNM

1. Transport
Transport was provided by the Portuguese Airforce and their Puma, based at Porto Santo. The plan was for a two-night visit but was extended for another night as the helicopter had to go off on a mercy mission to an Iranian ship. As a result, we were not picked up at the appointed time, and as our radio had gone on the blink we did not know what alternative plans had been made. We therefor sat by our luggage for 26 hrs. This was very frustrating as there was so much to do, but we could not move away. Though the radios had just undergone very expensive repairs they let us down and must be replaced as they are vital on such a trip.

2. *Pterodroma feae* (*deserta*)
On the first night the nets were placed in the same position as on the previous visit, two weeks earlier. On the next night we decided not to put them up, but when the helicopter failed to appear as scheduled we waited till 20:00 and then put up four nets at the southern limit of the plateau. At this point the helicopter flew over (but didn't land), so we tore down the nets and never replaced them. Thus, all birds caught on the night of 1 September were caught on the ground.

Plate 16. Night work.

Plate 17. Head and underwing of *Pterodroma deserta*.

On all of the three the nights we were on Bugio there was considerable noise from the birds. The first call was at about 21:25. On the first two nights when the moon came up at about 23:30 the plateau fell silent with the rising moon. The moon was four days after full. On the final night there was considerable cloud cover and wind, and it even rained, and as the moon was covered by cloud most of the night the Freiras kept up their eerie sounds all night.

Plate 18. Frank Zino with daughter Francesca and deserta chick.

There were many *P. deserta* calls from an area north of the plateau on the western face of the island. About 70 m down the side there is a small flat area with the remains of a gun-butt. This area has been visited by FZ in the past and there are several burrows there. It would be worthwhile spending a night there in the future and netting.

During the day the remaining burrows on the plateau were numbered. Prior to numbering, all nests were put through the same examinations as on the previous visit. We now have over 200 burrows numbered. Some more nests in which the bird could be reached by hand were discovered. On the second day we visited the nests which we knew from the first visit that the bird could be reached. We thus ended up with 14 pairs of birds from known nests.

We had a severe setback with the system we used for numbering the nests. The white identifying plastic discs with red numbers are obviously attractive to the gulls for they have pulled up a whole series of the numbered discs from their position despite the six-inch nails securing them to the ground. Fifty new rings applied; 38 birds controlled.

3. Bulwers Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii*
Whereas on the previous visit we ringed 41 Bulwers, on this visit we only caught six. Why this huge difference is hard to explain. None of the birds caught were re-traps. All birds weighed under 100gm and two birds under 80gm. One bird vomited three fish into the net. These were collected and are now with the MMF. Six birds were ringed.

4. Madeiran Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma castro*
As with the Bulwers, we had a marked decline in captures when compared with the last visit just two weeks before. Only five birds were captured, all on the second night. There was also a marked decline in the number of birds heard flying about. We had no recaptures. Five birds were ringed.

5. Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris borealis*
There was a marked increase in the number of Cory's seen and heard on this visit in comparison with the last visit two weeks ago. Walking round at night we found many birds resting on the ground outside their nests on the plateau. There are certainly many more nests than I would have thought. It would be interesting to know if this influx relates to a cycle such as is observed on the Selvagens.

6. Other birds
Nothing out of the ordinary was noted, except maybe the massive number of Herring Gulls *Larus michahellis*. On the morning of 2 September, the gulls started to move up from Ponta da Agulha in a Northerly direction. They moved up in a continuous long flock flying high. We counted 400–500. What these gulls eat is cause for serious concern. We heard them and saw them hunting over the plateau in moonlight, where no doubt they feed on *Bulwers* and *Castros,* whose half-eaten remains we have found. Later in the season they may well take young *Pterodromas* that come to the burrow entrance to exercise. It is our opinion that the gulls should be severely culled next breeding season. Plans to this effect should be made now. Birds seen: 3–4 Buzzards; 2 Kestrels; 2 Rock Pigeons; c15 Berthelot's Pipits; 2 Swifts; 4–5 Terns, 300–400 Canaries; 400–500 Gulls.

7. Lizards
As on the last visit, we saw a huge amount of lizards, many of which were nearly black. As we had a 24hr wait for the helicopter we spent a long time sitting around, and observed how aggressive these lizards are.

8. Butterflies and moths
The only butterflies seen on this visit were Painted Ladies *Vanessa cardui* of which we saw at least three. There were many medium sized moths at night, including what appeared to be a Hawk Moth, but we were unable to identify it. What all these things eat I am not sure.

9. Beetles and other insects
There were less beetles than on the last visit and certainly we were not plagued by them in our tents as we were then. There were no bumble bees or hover flies (which we saw last time), nor the plague of little insects that nearly drove us mad with their bites.

10. Mammals
As on the last visit there were considerable numbers of very healthy looking rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus*. They were very nearly put to culinary use when the helicopter did not appear!! We saw some splendid goats and found a freshly dead kid. This was to be brought back as it was so fresh, but it went off with the delay. The cause of death was almost certainly a fracture of a hind leg, no doubt from a fall.

11. Flora
There were no great changes from the last visit. We discovered a fern on a rock face (specimen to MMF) and much bracken. The goats do not eat the green leaves, but dig up the roots and feed on them.

12. Museum specimens
Three *Deserta* eggs, of which two were old and one fractured fresh; three fish vomited by Bulwer. Fern from rock face for identification; three large empty snails; two beetles; several *Deserta* lice.

The rich vein of field reports came to an end in 2011, when helicopters no longer became available because of a lack of funds for the Portuguese Air Force, and a lack of RN ship visits - and also because, as Frank explains, 'I was getting too old to climb the cliffs'.

Since then, all monitoring has been done by visiting IFCN wardens. Transport remains the main problem, and there has been very patchy coverage of the island in recent years. The wardens have to climb up, and they are all excellent men, but sometimes bureaucracy intervenes. There is a long-term plan to build a permanent house on Bugio (the ones pictured mostly blew away) but at the moment that is a very distant prospect. Meanwhile, it is sad to report that in 2022 not a single bird was ringed, reportedly because of bad weather.

In spite of this rather downbeat picture, I think there is much to be positive about. A huge amount of valuable information has been gained over the past sixty years, this largely thanks to the Zino family and accompanying friends, and monitoring is maintained by the IFCN wardens. I think one can say with confidence that on Bugio the birds are safe and appear to be prospering.

David Dobson
Email: editor@rnbws.org.uk

Madeira 2023 - RNBWS continuing support for Zino's Petrel conservation

by Lieutenant Commander P Boak

(Photograph by the author)

RNBWS support for Zino's Petrel *Pterodroma madeira* has been going on for some years now, and in May 2023 I took mid-deployment leave from HMS *Scott* to spend a week on Madeira to provide this year's contribution. Weather-wise, I chose a bad week (not that I had a choice), for it was very blustery, but at least it was better than the week before, when high winds led to the closure of the airport for several days. As a result, I only managed to get up to the mountain netting site on one mercifully clear night, but even then it was too blustery for Frank and Buffy to put up the nets. It was still a wonderful night for me.

Zino's Petrel is still regarded as one of the most endangered seabirds of Europe, with breeding populations confined to the steep and mountainous slopes of the central mountainous massif of Madeira. Once considered extinct, the survival of the species is mostly due to the efforts of the late Alec Zino[1], after whom the bird is named, and his son Frank, who continues vital conservation efforts to this day. A key aim of my trip was to utilise thermal imaging technology to record the behaviour of the petrels as they returned at night to the mountainous slopes near Pico do Arieiro (1,818 m), Madeira's third highest peak. Thermal imaging is the process of converting infrared radiation into visual images. The technology has long been available, used by the world's armed forces, hunters and wildlife film-makers, but it is becoming progressively affordable, with high performance handheld devices now available off the shelf.

On the night of 18 May 23 just such a device, a tripod-mounted Leica Calonox View, was used to obtain never-before seen footage of the courtship behaviour of dozens of Zino's Petrels as they wheeled in the dark sky above Pico do Arieiro[2] and engaged in the pair-flying that is typical of other Pterodroma species. Even more exciting was the sheer abundance of the birds visible in the moonless night. Previously, estimates of numbers have all been based on call analysis, but this was subject to error as not all birds make calls, and differentiating the individual birds from a sonogram can prove difficult. From the thermal imaging video, high numbers of the birds were observed, which is extremely good news for the species.

I have since put the thermal imager to wider use, and it was invaluable in the ship one night when it helped us to identify a wooden migrant vessel, far off the coast of Africa. Next, I hope to purchase motion-activated cameras and better audio recording devices to film and record the Zino's Petrel in more detail.

1 https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1457004/Alec-Zino.html

2 View the full video on the RNBWS Facebook site

Plate 19. Thermal imaging of Zino's Petrels.

In spite of the unhelpful weather, the week was excellent, and I learned a lot about the wildlife, history and heritage of Madeira, as well as Zino's Petrel. Amongst other things I saw all the endemic birds, had behind the scenes tours of the Funchal Natural History Museum and the Marine Biology Station, with Frank Zino and Manuel José Biscoito being hugely helpful at all stages (Manuel José Biscoito is senior curator at the Funchal Natural History Museum and head of the Marine Biology Station). It was also a great privilege to meet Frank and Buffy Zino in person.

Of course, I would have liked to get into the mountains more to see Zino's petrel, and have several other exciting ideas and projects on the horizon; and I hope to visit again and put these into action next year.

Future trips to Madeira are certainly warranted, in order to continue observing and recording the behaviour of this bird using thermal imaging and other technology. A huge thank you goes to Manuel Jose Biscoito for allowing me to stay at the Marine Biology Station, and to Frank and Buffy Zino for their hospitality and assistance in making the trip possible.

Philip Boak
Email: secretary@rnbws.org.uk

Thirty years of seabird records in the Seychelles

by Adrian Skerrett

Background

As a new resident of Seychelles in 1980, I struggled to produce a definitive list of the birds of Seychelles. I discussed the problem with James Ferguson-Lees and David Fisher, both bird tour leaders visiting Seychelles, Chris Feare working on Bird Island, John Phillips (Warden of Cousin Island Nature Reserve) and Ian Bullock (Warden of Aride island Nature Reserve), and in 1992 we formed Seychelles Bird Records Committee (SBRC), holding our inaugural meeting in London. Our geographical region was to be the Seychelles EEZ, an area encompassing only 455 square kilometres of land, but more than 1.3 million square kilometres of ocean. Evidently seabird records were going to be a major area of interest and a major challenge.

The first task of SBRC was to draw up a provisional list of the birds of Seychelles identifying the status of each. We appealed for historic reports in various journals and contacted all known birdwatchers with an interest in Seychelles. Observations were assessed from photographs where available, or otherwise from descriptions and field sketches. Critical examination of some records (including even some published records) led to their rejection or re-identification. Over the years, new records of species never previously reported from Seychelles were received and assessed.

Plate 20. Founding members of SBRC in winter plumage at their inaugural meeting in 1992. L-R Chris Feare, John Phillips, Ian Bullock, James Ferguson-Lees, David Fisher, Adrian Skerrett. © *SBRC*

Figure 1. Seychelles Archipelago. © *SBRC*

SBRC published its first full report in 1996, listing 14 non-breeding seabird species recorded in Seychelles (Skerrett 1996). Subsequent reports at intervals of about 5 years raised the total to 31 by the end of 2021 (Skerrett *et al.* 2022). The following is a summary of what we have learned over the last 30 years.

Gulls and skuas

In 1992, only one gull and one skua species had been recorded with reasonable certainty in Seychelles. These were Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* and Brown Skua *Stercorarius antarcticus*. One of the small dark-headed gull species was also known to occur, attributed by some observers to Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* of Europe to northeast America and by some to Brown-headed Gull *C. brunnicephalus* of southern and central Asia.

Lesser Black-backed Gull

Lesser Black-backed Gull is a polytypic species with very complex systematics. *Birds of the World* currently recognises five subspecies (Billerman *et al.* 2022). Seventeen records have been accepted by SBRC as of June 2023, comprising nine *heuglini*, five nominate *fuscus*, one *barabensis* and two indeterminate between *heuglini* and *barabensis*. Three further records have been accepted as indeterminate between Lesser Black-backed (Steppe) Gull *L. f. barabensis* and Caspian Gull *L. cachinnans*.

The dominance of *heuglini* records is not surprising given its long-distance migration from northern Siberia to winter from southern Asian shores to the Middle East and south to East Africa. Likewise *barabensis*, which breeds on the central Asian steppes, wintering mostly in southwest Asia. Perhaps more surprising is the high proportion of nominate race records, but this is a long-distance migrant breeding from northern Europe to the White Sea (northwest Russia), wintering mainly in Africa and southwest Asia.

Black-, Brown- and Grey-headed Gulls

Formerly included in the genus *Larus*, these three species along with two others have been reclassified fairly recently as the genus *Chroicocephalus*. Representatives of the genus are found the world over, each species usually confined to a particular region. In 1992, the options for the identity of sightings in Seychelles appeared to be either Black-headed Gull, of Europe to northeast America or Brown-headed Gull, breeding in southern and Central Asia and wintering on coasts of southeast Asia west to the Arabian Peninsula. Many observers and the only available field guide at this time considered the Asian species more likely based on distribution (Penny 1974). However, examination of records by SBRC showed that all records that could be authenticated were Black-headed Gull. Although this breeds further from Seychelles than Brown-headed Gull, northern populations are long-distance migrants and the winter range also includes tropical East Africa.

In addition, Grey-headed Gull *C. cirrocephalus* was claimed to be a vagrant to Farquhar (Feare and Watson 1984). This seems plausible given that Farquhar is at the southern tip of Seychelles, little more than 100 nautical miles north of Madagascar, where the species breeds. However, no evidence could be traced for assessment by SBRC and to date no other reports have emerged.

The possibility remains that one day, Grey-headed Gull or Brown-headed Gull or indeed both might be recorded. Meanwhile, six records have been accepted as indeterminate between the three species due to insufficiently conclusive evidence.

Other gulls

SBRC has added two other gull species to the Seychelles list, both from sightings of single birds in breeding plumage. A Sooty Gull *Larus hemprichii* on Aride Island in August 2005 was unsurprising given that this species breeds from Pakistan and the Persian Gulf south to the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, wintering south to northern Mozambique. Far more surprising was a Franklin's Gull *Leucophaeus pipixcan* at D'Arros in May 2017. This species breeds in central provinces of Canada and adjacent states of the northern USA, wintering in the Caribbean and South America. Elsewhere it is a rare vagrant to northwest Europe, South Africa, west Africa, Australia and Japan.

Plate 21. Franklin's Gull breeding adult at D'Arros, almost 10,000 miles from its breeding grounds. *© CK Daly of the Save Our Seas Foundation, D'Arros Research Centre*

Skuas

In 1992, Brown Skua was the only species of skua recorded in Seychelles. Since then, SBRC has accepted 10 records of South Polar Skua *Catharacta maccormicki*, six of Arctic Skua *S. parasiticus* and one of Pomarine Skua *S. pomarinus*. Four of the South Polar Skua records came from a satellite tracking study at two locations on the Antarctic continent that showed birds move north mainly to the Mozambique Channel and northern Indian Ocean (Weimerskirch *et al.* 2015).

Plate 22. Black-naped Terns at Farquar. Seychelles hosts the entire African population. © *C Savy*

Terns

Nine species of tern breed in Seychelles: Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*, Lesser Noddy *A. tenuirostris*, Fairy Tern *Gygis alba*, Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus*, Bridled Tern *O. anaethetus*, Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*, Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii*, Black-naped Tern *S. sumatrana* and Great Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii*. A further nine species are non-breeding visitors.

Sternula terns

In 1971, small terns seen in Seychelles were identified as Damara Tern *Sternula balaenarum* (Mountfort 1971). Penny accepted this identification but added that Little Tern *S. albifrons* is also commonly seen in Seychelles (Penny 1974). Later, it was shown that Damara Tern was a misidentification and small terns arriving at Bird Island retaining breeding plumage were Saunders's Tern *S. saundersi* (Feare and Bourne 1978).

Little Tern was recorded in breeding plumage for the first time in 1997 and a further five records were accepted up to 2022. It seemed likely that at least some birds seen in non-breeding plumage were Little Terns, but the conventional wisdom was that separation of non-breeding birds in the field was virtually impossible. SBRC members examined specimens at the Natural History Museum, Tring in an attempt to identify criteria for this, without success. Features of museum specimens overlapped, but some may have been misidentified.

In 2022, a new paper showed that the two species were actually fairly easily separated in non-breeding plumage based on a combination of features (Mullarney and Campbell 2022). SBRC reassessed photographs of all *Sternula* seen in Seychelles and specimen evidence. This shows that Saunders's Tern is a fairly common annual visitor to the outer islands and to Bird Island. However, Little Tern is an annual visitor in small numbers to the granitic islands where there have (so far) been no confirmed Saunders's Tern records, and a vagrant to the outer islands.

Plate 23. Saunders's Terns at Farquar. Seychelles may be an important wintering ground for the species. © *A Skerrett*

Re-examination of records by other authorities suggest Saunders's Tern is rare in East Africa and absent in winter from the Middle East and India. This means that Seychelles might host a significant proportion of the world's wintering Saunders's Terns. It is possible that counts from Seychelles might be a much better way of keeping tabs on the global population than trying to monitor very scattered, low density breeding populations in difficult to access areas of the Red Sea and Persian Gulf (Oscar Campbell, pers. comm.).

Marsh terns

Marsh terns of the genus *Chlidonias* are typically found in freshwater marshes, not coastal or island locations. Nevertheless two of the four *Chlidonias* species recognised have been recorded in Seychelles. By far the more common is White-winged Tern *C. leucopterus* recorded annually in small numbers throughout the islands. Whiskered Tern *C. hybridus* is a vagrant and SBRC has accepted nine records to June 2023.

Other terns

There have been four records of White-cheeked Tern *Sterna repressa.* This is a tropical coastal species breeding from the Red Sea south to Somalia and Kenya, and from the Persian Gulf and Oman to western India. It is often found at sea including regular sightings 5–10 km off the Kenya coast. It is probably a more frequent visitor to Seychelles than is currently realised, perhaps overlooked or mistaken for Common Tern *Sterna hirundo.*

SBRC has also recorded six records of Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis* and eighteen of Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*. Common Tern and Lesser Crested Tern *Thalasseus bengalensis* are annual visitors.

Petrels

Storm-petrels

Prior to the formation of SBRC, it was known that storm-petrels of one or more species were visitors to Seychelles waters. Penny (1974) suggested six possibilities: Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*, European (British) Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*, Swinhoe's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma monorhis*, Matsudaira's Storm-petrel *Hydrobates matsudairae*, White-faced Storm-petrel *Pelagodroma marina* and Black-bellied Storm Petrel *Fregetta tropica*.

In its first report, SBRC confirmed the occurrence of Wilson's Storm-petrel (Skerrett 1996). White-faced Storm-petrel and Swinhoe's Storm-petrel were added in the second report (Skerrett *et al.* 2001), Matsudaira's Storm-petrel in the third report (Skerrett *et al.* 2006) and Black-bellied Storm-petrel in the fourth report (Skerrett *et al.* 2011). There have been no reports of European Storm-petrel in the entire western Indian Ocean and based on distribution it is unlikely to be a regular visitor. It is probable that all recorded storm-petrel species are much more frequent visitors than the small number of records suggests. Difficulties in identification are compounded by the scarcity of pelagic observations.

A two-day chumming expedition over the Seychelles Bank in 2014 supported the theory that pelagic species are far more common than is currently known. The expedition located 14 Matsudaira's Storm-petrels, doubling the number of sightings in the whole of the western Indian Ocean (including unverified sightings) and suggesting that Seychelles may be a significant wintering site for the species; the sighting of 25 Wilson's Storm-petrels over the same period suggests it too is likely to be a frequent annual visitor (Shirihai and Skerrett 2016).

Gadfly petrels (*Pterodroma*)

Gadfly petrels are strictly oceanic seabirds named for their speedy weaving flight (as if evading gadflies). No species of gadfly petrel had been recorded in Seychelles until the turn of the 21st century. Since then, four species have been added to the Seychelles list, two due to a remarkable series of sightings at Cousin Island and two due to technological advances allowing remote tracking devices to be fitted to seabirds.

In 2003, an intermediate morph Kermadec Petrel *P. neglecta* was found at Cousin. Another, or very likely the same individual was recorded again in 2004 when it was captured, ringed and released. In 2007, a dark morph bird was found and in 2009, the ringed bird was recorded with a dark adult and a chick. The same year, a dark morph Herald Petrel *P. heraldica* was also recorded at Cousin.

Plate 24. Round Island Petrel at Mauritius. © *N Ramen*

'Round Island Petrel' is the name given to hybrids involving at least three species of *Pterodroma* breeding on Round Island, Mauritius, where about 80% are thought to be morphologically close to Trindade Petrel *P. arminjoniana*, about 10% Herald Petrel and 10% Kermadec Petrel (Safford & Hawkins 2013). A tracking programme has shown that these petrels undertake non-breeding migrations (typically of six months) to different areas across much of the tropical Indian Ocean, including Seychelles waters. In 2010–2011, thirty birds were tracked using the Seychelles EEZ showing a presence concentrated at the edges of banks from Farquhar to the Amirantes and especially the eastern edge of the Seychelles Bank. Since then there has been one sight record also accepted by SBRC (Skerrett *et al.* 2016, Skerrett *et al.* 2017).

Barau's Petrel *P. baraui* is an endemic endangered gadfly petrel breeding at Reunion Island. In 2008–2009, global location sensing was used to show petrels migrated up to 5,000 km from their breeding colony to the central and eastern Indian Ocean (Pinet *et al.* 2011). In 2017–2018, eight of 15 tracked juveniles used the Seychelles EEZ. Since then there have been a further two sight records accepted by SBRC to June 2023.

***Bulweria* petrels**

Two species of *Bulweria* occur in the Indian Ocean and are likely visitors to Seychelles waters. These are Jouanin's Petrel *B. fallax* which breeds at Socotra and probably other localities in the Arabian Sea, and Bulwer's Petrel *B. bulwerii,* a much more widespread species with breeding populations in tropical and subtropical waters of the Atlantic and the Pacific. The latter travel west from Pacific waters and some visit the Indian Ocean. Recently, what may prove to be a third form of *Bulweria* has been seen and photographed in waters around the Comoros (Shirihai & Bretagnolle, 2015). These birds are intermediate in some features between Jouanin's and Bulwer's and make the identification of *Bulweria* petrels around Seychelles even more challenging. As a consequence, SBRC reviewed records, concluding that for the time being in the absence of a specimen or measurements it will treat all sight records of *Bulweria* petrels as *Bulweria sp.* until the situation around the Comoros petrels is clarified. As a result, the SBRC archive now contains

17 records accepted as *Bulweria sp*, one record of Bulwer's Petrel accepted with a caveat re the Comoros Petrel and no records of Jouanin's Petrel.

Other petrels

A fourth petrel species known from satellite technology to occur in Seychelles is Mascarene Petrel *Pseudobulweria aterrima*. In 2017–2020, nine birds were tracked entering the Seychelles EEZ, four passing through towards the northern Indian Ocean and five remaining for part of their non-breeding season.

SBRC has also accepted one sight record of Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus* and one of Cape Petrel *Daption capense*. One further record has been accepted as either Southern Giant Petrel or Northern Giant Petrel *M. halli*.

Other seabirds

Cormorants

In 1992, there was only one known Seychelles record of any cormorant, a Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* seen on a single day at Cousin Island. The second recorded bird of this species at Bird Island in 2017 has remained present since this date to the time of writing, the longest known continual presence of any non-breeding visitor to Seychelles. Meanwhile, Long-tailed Cormorant *P. africanus* has been recorded six times to June 2023, including up to 21 birds remaining for 10 months at Aldabra and one at Mahe for 6 months.

Plate 25. Great Cormorant at Bird Island; only the second record for Seychelles, but it has remained for over five years. © *A Skerrett*

Shearwaters
Two species of shearwater are known to breed in Seychelles, Tropical Shearwater *Puffinus bailloni* and Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna pacificus*. A third shearwater species, Flesh-footed Shearwater *A. carneipes* has been recorded by SBRC as a vagrant to the Seychelles EEZ eight times.

Tropicbirds
Worldwide, there are three species of tropicbird in one genus, *Phaethon*. Two species - White-tailed Tropicbird *P. lepturus* and Red-tailed Tropicbird *P. rubricauda* - are resident breeding species in Seychelles, while the third, Red-billed Tropicbird *P. aethereus,* is a vagrant recorded fourteen times. On occasion, vagrants have remained present on Bird Island for up to one year with the visiting Red-billed Tropicbird appearing to try to court the local White-tailed Tropicbirds, without success.

Plate 26. A resident White-tailed Tropicbird (left) interacting with a visiting Red-Billed Tropicbird on Bird Island. © *C Savy*

Albatross
No albatross species has been recorded with certainty in Seychelles, but SBRC has accepted one record of albatross sp. In June 1966, Louis Warren was serving on the USS *Cony* DD-508, and steaming north from Diego Suarez after port calls in Madagascar. For several days a lone albatross followed the ship, hovering over the stern and gliding around the vessel. He described it as looking "like a Great Black-backed Gull on steroids" and determined it to be a Black-browed Albatross. The bird followed the ship from the southern boundary of the Seychelles EEZ to near Alphonse Island. SBRC could not confirm the species on the basis of the description, but accepted the bird was probably either Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophris* or Shy Albatross *T. cauta.*

Frigatebirds and boobies
Two species of frigatebird (Lesser Frigatebird *Fregata ariel* and Great Frigatebird *F. minor*) and three species of booby (Red-footed Booby *Sula sula*, Masked Booby *S. dactylatra* and Brown Booby *S. leucogaster*) breed in Seychelles. No non-breeding visitors of either species have been recorded.

What next?

Doubtless the list of seabirds recorded in Seychelles waters will grow. Additions are likely to include prions and unknown species have already been reported (Voous 1965). Currently, the difficulty of species identification and lack of material available for assessment has not permitted any validation by SBRC. Antarctic Prion *Pachyptila desolata* and Slender-billed Prion *P. belcheri*, both collected at Madagascar and reported elsewhere in the Western Indian Ocean are perhaps most likely.

Black Tern *C. niger* is likely one day. It is a regular to East Africa, west of Seychelles and has been recorded both to the east in the Chagos Archipelago (Carr 2015) and to the south in Madagascar (Turner and Dowsett 1988).

Many other seabird species have been recorded in neighbouring waters of the region but not yet in Seychelles. They include three species of shearwater seen in both the Maldives to the north of Seychelles (Anderson and Shimal 2020) and in the vicinity of Madagascar to the south (Safford and Hawkins 2013). These are Short-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna tenuirostris*, Sooty Shearwater *A. grisea* and Streaked Shearwater *Calonectris leucomelas*. Likewise, Soft-plumaged Petrel *Pterodroma mollis* and White-headed Petrel *P. lessonii* of cool temperate and sub-Antarctic waters have been recorded as far north as Sri Lanka (De Silva 2011), so certainly passed through Seychelles latitudes.

No vagrant frigatebird nor booby has been recorded in Seychelles. Christmas Island Frigatebird *F. andrewsi* is a possibility, given it has been recorded as far west as the Kenya coast (Fisher and Hunter 2016). Abbott's Booby *Papasula abbotti* is another intriguing possibility. It once had a more widespread breeding distribution including at Assumption Island in Seychelles, but it is now confined to Christmas Island. However, it has been recorded as a vagrant to Maldives (Anderson and Shimal 2020).

In the future, it will also be interesting to see if any seabird species naturally colonises Seychelles. The observations of gadfly petrels at Cousin suggest this might have already happened, perhaps on Cousin or at the summit of Aride Island or on islets of Aldabra Atoll, where no one is ever present at night to bear witness. Long stays by some vagrants suggest they might be on the brink of colonisation should others of their kind follow. Perhaps climate change too will trigger unforeseen movements of some species.

SBRC will continue to monitor the status of all breeding seabirds. In common with global trends there have been large declines in most Seychelles seabird populations in recent decades, even at protected sites.

Satellite technology is likely to show that many pelagic species are annual visitors and not vagrants. No doubt there will be more surprises. It may be simpler to list which species are more improbable rather than those that are probable, such as flightless penguins or some restricted-range species. But most true seabirds are wide-ranging citizens of the world and for them, the oceans are one big inter-connected pond.

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founding member of the committee and Chairman for 24 years, from 1997 until his death from cancer in 2021. His worldwide network of contacts was particularly useful in resolving some of the more difficult issues of seabird identification.

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Adrian Skerrett
Email: askerrett@hotmail.com

Seawatching at Chrysochou Bay, Cyprus during the autumns of 2020–22

by Colin Richardson

(All photographs by the author)

Seawatching off the Cyprus coast is not a straightforward exercise. The sea is relatively barren, with a paucity of food for marine life, so very few seabirds use the surrounding seas for feeding or breeding. An exception is the European 'Mediterranean' Shag *Gulosus aristotelis desmarestii*, which in spite of there being only 70 breeding pairs in Cyprus feeds regularly in Chrysochou Bay, and I saw up to six most days, with a maximum of 18 on 1 Sep 2021. However, much more interesting is the autumn migration, for large numbers of birds pass the island without needing to stop or feed. In general, autumn migrants pass from August to November, although movement can begin as early as mid June for some species, particularly waders. By July many waterbirds are on the move, including Baltic *Larus f. fuscus* and Slender-billed Gulls *Larus genei*, ducks, herons and egrets, many of which are visible along the north coast in autumn. Garganey *Spatula querquedula* is the most numerous duck, comprising about 80% of the water birds passing, with some daily totals of over a thousand. During early-mid August Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* can also show daily totals of 1,000 plus, while from late August to mid September daily totals of up to 900 Grey Herons *Ardea cinerea* and up to 700 Purple Herons *Ardea purpurea* have occurred (Flint & Richardson *in press.*). Some of these waterbirds fly south through the mountain passes, but most arrive in Morphou and Chrysochou bays, before coasting around the island and flying south towards the Nile delta.

Every autumn I position myself on the southern shoreline of Chrysochou Bay, near the town of Polis, a pastime I have been enjoying almost every year since 2003. My previous experiences from then until 2019 are detailed in short papers in *Sea Swallow* 64 (2015) & 69 (2020). I thought it would be useful to provide an update and here I include a summary of my autumn sightings from 2020–22, accompanied by some photos.

Plate 27. Four 'Mediterranean' Shags resting on a breakwater, 3 Aug 2022.

Figure 1. Coastal migration in autumn on north coast of Cyprus. © *C Richardson*

I seawatched for 5–7 hours daily on 13 days in 2020 and 2022 and 14 in 2021. These were the COVID-19 pandemic years, when social distancing was the order of the day, so isolating myself on the coast was not difficult, and actually a real bonus. I rather optimistically started my seawatching in late June, but this date is usually too early to witness any marked movement; more an act of desperation in view of the complete lack of passerine migrants occurring throughout the island, plus my keenness to see something big on the move. Waterbirds often head south very early, and my optimism was not entirely without foundation, as a very early Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* flew off the sea on 24 June 2020, and an adult Mediterranean Gull *Ichthyaetus melanocephalus* landed on the beach on 27 June 2020. These are winter visitors and not normally expected in Cyprus until late October, so they were very unusual on such early dates. More timely were a Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* and a Grey Heron on 22 June 2022. The earliest groups of other migrants (per species chronologically) were three Glossy Ibis and two Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* on 1 July 2020, two Little Ringed Plovers *Charadrius dubius* on 8 July 2021, two White-winged Terns *Chlidonias leucopterus* on 11 July 2020, 28 Garganey on 19 July 2021 and 13 Black-headed Gulls *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* on 22 July 2021. Purple Heron is a late migrant, with the first flock of 49 on 16 August 2020.

Plate 28. Typical low coasting behaviour of migrating Glossy Ibis, 9 Aug 2022.

Total numbers of the most common species each autumn were:

Species	2020	2021	2022
Little Egret	15	132	11
Grey Heron	19	121	395
Purple Heron	52	1086	458
Glossy Ibis	377	1249	1243
Garganey	440	2883	1715

The highest daily counts during the autumn periods were 676 Purple Heron on 5 Sep 2021, 790 Glossy Ibis on 9 Aug 2022 and 624 Garganey 31 Aug 2021. These were spectacular numbers, with groups of birds appearing over the horizon several times per hour.

Plate 29. A flock of 80+ herons, mainly Purple, but with a few Grey & Night mixed in, 9 Sep 2022.

Plate 30. A disciplined group of Grey Herons heading south, 10 Oct 2021.

Plate 31. Synchronised flying of Purple Herons, 1 Sep 2021.

Plate 32. Part of a flock of 80 Purple Herons, 9 Sep 2022.

Plate 33. Purple Herons moving south at sunset over Chrysochou Bay, 1 Sep 2021.

Plate 34. Part of the large movement of Purple Herons moving south in early Sep 2021.

Plate 35. Part of the record number of 790 Glossy Ibis which flew over on 9 Aug 2022.

Plate 36. Glossy Ibis heading south over Chrysochou Bay, 21 Aug 2022.

Regarding shearwaters and petrels, only two species are likely to occur in Cyprus: Scopoli's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* and Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan*. Scopoli's dominated at my viewing point and most days I would see perhaps one an hour. However, on 21 Oct 2021, 186 were counted about two km offshore, flying west in lines of about six birds a minute, sometimes feeding en route. During the three-year period 2020–22, in 40 days of seawatching, 310 Scopoli's Shearwaters were seen, compared to only 12 Yelkouan Shearwaters. The largest groups of Yelkouan were three, on 21 Sep 2021 and 9 Sep 2022, on both occasions heading west in loose association with Scopoli's.

Single figures of other regular coasting species included Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*, Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*, Great Egret *Ardea alba*, Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*, Common Teal *Anas crecca*, Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata*, Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*, Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*, Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*, Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*, Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*, Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*, Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*, Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus* and Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*. There were odd 'local' Eleonora's Falcons *Falco eleonorae* hunting offshore on nine occasions between July and early October, and four Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, two Montagu's *C. pygargus* and one Pallid Harrier *C. macrourus* coming off the sea and working hard to reach shore.

Plate 37. A juvenile Collared Pratincole landed on the beach, 3 Aug 2022.

Plate 38. Seawatch site at Polis, overlooking Chrysochou Bay, 26 Aug 2022.

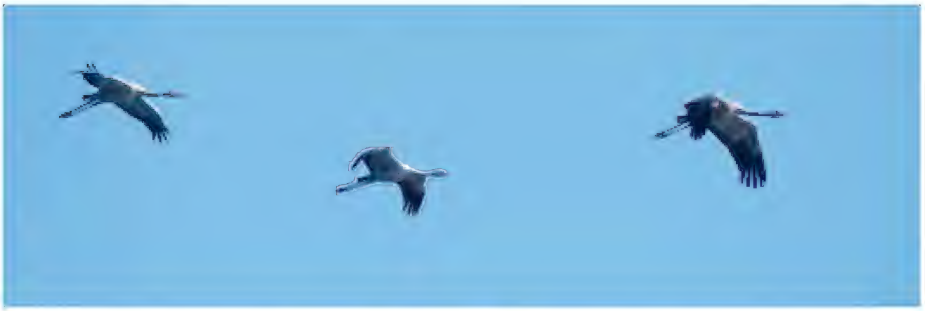

Plate 39. Three of the group of four Common Cranes which flew off the sea, 24 Oct 2021.

Plate 40. A group of 18 Stone Curlews flying along the coast, 8 Oct 2022.

Plate 41. A Terek Sandpiper on Polis Beach, 17 Aug 2022, the 29th Cyprus record.

There were also a few unexpected, rather scarce species which made a day's seawatching even more worthwhile. The best was a Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* (29th Cyprus record) on the beach on 17 Aug 2022 with a Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*, itself also rather uncommon. There was one Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* on 23 Jul 2022 and two on 21 Aug 2022; single Arctic Skuas *Stercorarius parasiticus* on 1 Jul 2020, 22 Jul 2021 and 10 Oct 2021 and three heading west on 3 Oct 2022; four Common Cranes *Grus grus* 24 Oct 2021; six Pied Avocets *Recurvirostra avosetta* 17 Sep 2021; and one Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* 5 Aug 2021. Unusually, 18 Eurasian Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus* passed along the coast on 8 Oct 2022, one of the few occasions the species has been recorded migrating around the island.

I am looking forward to my session of seawatching again in autumn 2023, but am very worried about what I might find. Or what I may not find. Cyprus lies due south of the Black Sea and Ukraine, from where many of our migrating waterbirds originate. It is likely that passage will be a shadow of previous years, due to the destruction of the Kakhovka dam, which led to the flooding of their breeding habitats in the Gulf of Dnipro, in the Black Sea west of the Crimean peninsula, at a critical time in their breeding cycle.

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Colin Richardson
Email: richar@cytanet.com.cy

Postscript

Destruction of the Kakhovka Dam, Ukraine, 6 June 2023

The Kakhovka dam was destroyed maliciously by explosives in the early hours of 6 Jun 2023. Located on the 2,240 km long Dnipro river, which flows from Kyiv in the north of Ukraine to the Black Sea in the south, the reservoir was located near the southern city of Kherson, and at 240 km long was the largest in Ukraine in terms of water volume (18.19 km^3). The flooding downstream covered an area of at least 5,000 km^2, while the exposed zone formerly covered by the reservoir exceeded 1,000 km^2. Downstream, 48 different protected areas were affected, including a biosphere reserve, three national parks, 16 reserves, three nature sanctuaries and 22 natural sites. In the flood zone, important nesting sites of water and shorebird species were wholly or partially destroyed, including tens of thousands of individuals. The lower Dnipro flood plains were habitat to the largest colonies of herons and other colonial birds in the region. Of those species usually passing Cyprus in large numbers in autumn, herons (particularly Great White Egret, Squacco & Purple Herons), Glossy Ibis, all the 'marsh' terns (*Chlidonias niger, leucopterus* and *hybrida*) and ducks (especially Garganey and Northern Shoveler), and all their nesting colonies are believed to have been affected. The flooding and associated pollution will have had a huge impact on birds during their nesting period, especially the fledglings. There would have been no time left for the establishment of new colonies and subsequent breeding. It is estimated that such losses will take 3–7 years to recover. Upstream of the dam, there were over 11 different nature parks, reserves and protected areas, all at risk, with experts fearing that many of these valuable areas of nature may have disappeared altogether (source: Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group).

Plate 42. A single Glossy Ibis resting in Chrysochou River, 16 Sep 2022.

Ringing autumn migrating birds in Ngulia, Kenya

by CPO Mark Cutts

(Photographs by author, except where indicated)

In autumn 2022 I left the Navy after 35 years' service. I was by this time a registered Bird Ringer with an 'A' permit, allowed to ring under licence from the British Trust for Ornithology. I had found my true vocation and I was ready to spend the rest of my days ringing birds near my home on the island of Portland. However, when Martin Cade, Warden of the Portland Bird Observatory asked if I would be interested in going to Ngulia Lodge in Kenya to assist in the ringing of autumn migrants, I jumped at the chance, and in November 2022 I found myself en route to Africa. After landing late in the evening at Nairobi airport we arrived at the entrance to Tsavo National Park at around six the following morning. Another 45 minutes later we were walking onto the patio of the lodge, and within ten minutes we were ringing birds that previously I had only dreamed of.

Ngulia Lodge is situated in the middle of Tsavo National Park and sits 300 metres above wide plains to the East and the Ngulia Ridge to the south. It opened as a guest house in May 1969, and two watering holes were illuminated at night for guests to watch wildlife.

Figure 1. Tsavo West National Park, Kenya. © *Google Maps*

In December that year a visiting ornithologist, Alec Forbes-Watson, noticed a large number of birds hovering around the watering hole lights and it was soon realised that during moonless evenings in late November and December easterly winds bring mist and rain to the escarpment that the lodge sits on, and these, combined with the artificial lights, cause passing migrants to drop into the nearby bushes and trees, sometimes in their thousands.

From late November 1972 to early 1973 daily ringing took place for the first time and over 2,500 passerines were ringed, and that established the pattern for the next fifty years.

It was discovered that Tsavo West National Park lies on the migration route of a number of Eastern Palearctic Migrants. These are birds that breed in northern Europe across to central and southwest Asia. In the autumn they move south through the Middle East and Arabia on their way to Tanzania, Botswana and South Africa.

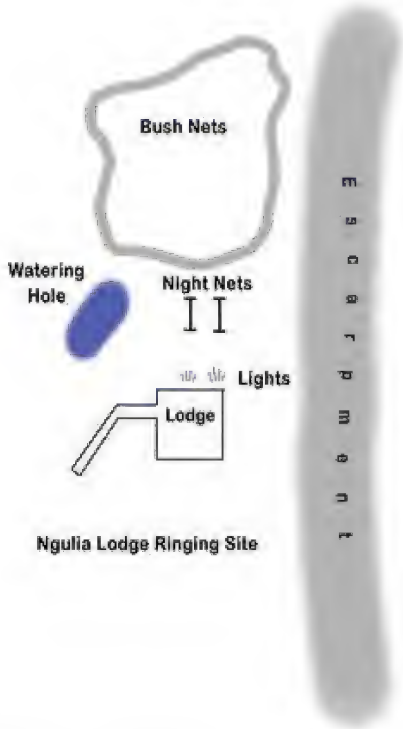

Figure 2. Ngulia Lodge. © *M Cutts*

The majority of migrating birds that pass through the region are made up of three species: Marsh Warbler, Thrush Nightingale and Common Whitethroat. Roughly 15 other species of migrant (see table) occur in smaller numbers. Two species of Afrotropical migrants also occur regularly: Harlequin Quail and Jacobin Cuckoo.

Plate 43. Harlequin Quail.

Plate 44. Jacobin or Pied Cuckoo.

Plate 45. The ringing team on the Lodge patio.

By the mid-1990s regular seasonal trapping and ringing took place during nights when the weather conditions were right for the birds. This was followed by mist netting at first light in an area roughly 70 metres square to the north of the lodge, and on good mornings over a thousand birds could be processed in the first hour and a half after dawn. Ringing would continue throughout the morning with teams of ringers and helpers, extracting, transporting, and processing birds. From the late morning onwards local nets would be deployed and large numbers of Barn Swallows and to a lesser extent House Martins were trapped as they swooped close to the watering holes.

In addition to the migrants a large number of local species are ringed including finches, weavers and up to seven species of nightjar. These are known as "Afrotrops" as they are birds of the Afrotropical realm.

By 2012 very nearly half a million birds had been ringed, comprising 61 species of palearctic migrant. Re-trapping of birds which had already been ringed in other countries or ringed at Ngulia and re-trapped elsewhere resulted in 222 recoveries from 45 countries.

This autumn ringing effort continues to this day, with groups of mainly British ringers travelling to Kenya to experience the mass migration.

As for us, we were joined over the next few days by ringers and helpers from the UK, ex-pats and local naturalists from the university of Nairobi and elsewhere. Some were like me first time visitors and others on as much as their fifteenth visit.

In our group it was decided that volunteers would stay up throughout the night to monitor the conditions and arrival of birds. Martin Cade and I volunteered to take the majority of these watches and so for the next fourteen days we napped by day as and when we could.

Each night just before dark two 1 kw halogen lamps were placed 10 metres from the lodge looking out into the light scrub to the north. If the birds started arriving, two single 18 metre nets would then be erected within the arc of the lights.

On some nights no mist formed, so no birds were trapped and no ringing took place, but on others the conditions were perfect and many birds were trapped. The mist would form in the early hours of the morning, roughly around two am and shortly after the birds would start to arrive. At this point the other ringers would be roused and up to four tables set up, each holding three ringers and one scribe (there to write down and record each bird's biometrics). Other

Plate 46. Donaldson Smith's Nightjar.

Plate 47. Basra Reed Warbler. © *D Lamsdell*

Plate 48. Grey-headed Kingfisher.

Plate 49. Turkestan Shrike. © *D Lamsdell*

Plate 50. Didric Cuckoo. © *D Lamsdell*

Plate 51. Lanner Falcon. © *D Lamsdell*

Plate 52. Common Rock Thrush.

Plate 53. Sulphur-breasted Bush-shrike.

Table 1. Ngulia Lodge ringing totals of western palearctic migrants, 17 November 2022 to 30 May 2023.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*	1,102	Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*	1
Barred Warbler *Crucca risoria*	43	Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*	1,290
Basra Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus griseldis*	3	Olive-tree Warbler *Hippoleus olivetorum*	84
Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*	1	Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*	1
Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum*	2	Red-backed Shrike *Laniuns collurio*	271
Common Nightingale *Luscina magarhynchos*	83	Red-rumped Swallow *Cectropis daurica*	1
Common Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*	8	River Warbler *Locustella fluviatilis*	35
Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*	2,275	Rufous Bush Chat *Cercotricas galactotis*	19
Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida*	41	Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*	95
Eurasian Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*	13	Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia*	2,426
Eurasian Roller *Coracius garrulus*	1	Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*	25
Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*	12	Upcher's Warbler *Hippolais languida*	27
Irania, or White-throated Robin *Irania gutturalis*	214	Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*	68
Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*	95	**Total**	**8,244**

helpers stood by the nets to extract the birds as they were trapped. Still others would transport birds to the ringers and release the birds safely on completion. This would continue until the nets were closed around 05:00. This allowed us to process any un-ringed birds, freshen up and grab a coffee before the start of the morning's ringing effort with the scrub nets opening at 05:30. Inevitably a good fall during the night would mean many birds still present in the area at first light.

Plate 54. African Paradise Flycatcher.

Over the 14 days we were there I ringed 793 birds of 22 migratory species. Personal highlights were European Roller, Common Rock Thrush and Basra Reed Warbler; I also ringed 76 birds of 23 Afrotropical species. These included Grey-headed Kingfisher and Asian Paradise-flycatcher.

The final total for the November visit was 8,244 birds (see Table 1), achieved during a mixture of hectic nights with over 2,000 birds and others with no mist and no birds at all. We thought our tally was pretty good, but it pales in comparison with one equivalent period in the mid-1990s when over 35,000 birds were trapped.

This valuable conservation work continues each year and hopefully I will be able to attend again in the very near future.

Many thanks to Colin Jackson, the organiser of the annual event, Martin Cade, the Hertfordshire ringers, Chris and Denise Lansdell and all the Kenyan ringers and helpers.

Mark Cutts
Email: expeditions@rnbws.org.uk

Birding in Bahrain - a beginner's journey

by Lieutenant J Crowe RN

(All photographs by the author)

In the back of a taxi, I breezed past a stand of Greater Flamingos clustered in the middle of the lagoon that lies directly outside Bahrain International Airport. Once again I chastised myself for not packing binoculars three months earlier when I had taken the well-trodden route between RAF Brize Norton and the UK Naval Support Facility in Bahrain. Fortunately, help was on hand as my father, visiting Bahrain for work, brought them from the UK. Finally, after two months, I began to explore Bahrain's somewhat surprising biodiversity.

The Kingdom of Bahrain is perhaps not the first place that comes to mind when you think of countries with a diverse array of bird life. The north of the island is expanding via land reclamation in every direction, a new skyscraper adorns the skyline seemingly weekly, and the oil fields of the desert south are devoid of life. This was certainly my impression, hence my leaving binoculars securely at home, but I could not have been more wrong.

Figure 1. Bahrain. © *Google Maps*

Plate 55. Greater Flamingos.

Plate 56. Common Myna.

Deployed to the UK Maritime Component Command Headquarters, the command element of the Royal Navy's presence in the Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean, I quickly became interested in the array of bird life as I trudged across the naval base at dawn or dusk to report for watch each morning or night. Often while returning to my accommodation, I would find a bird unfamiliar to me but ubiquitous to Bahrain, digging for insects on the perfectly manicured lawns that surround the Naval Support Facility. I resolved quickly to get myself a field guide for the Middle East and identify my new friends. As it turns out, the birds were Common Myna, which are considered highly invasive across much of the world. They are not native to Bahrain though the species is not considered a pest on the island. Manama, the nation's capital, has developed rapidly and food is easily scavenged from human waste. This means the Myna does not rely on eating newly fledged birds, which has been a major issue elsewhere outside its native range. From this point, field guide in hand, my birding journey had begun.

The time taken to get to grips with my new role, as well as my lack of binoculars and camera, meant that I didn't seriously investigate Bahrain's birds until I was joined in Bahrain by my partner in the lead up to Christmas. In the lush surrounds of one of Bahrain's better hotels, we were joined for lunch by a pair of Red-vented Bulbuls, another unknown to me, and after a quick Google we decided we needed to explore Bahrain's nature further.

Plate 57. Arad Bay.

A good starting point seemed to be the lagoon at the international airport. Arad Bay is a half square kilometre tidal lagoon, which is actively managed to maximise the habitat for breeding fish and wintering birds. Many Eurasian birds migrate through Bahrain and the government has worked to restore the original mangrove; now Arad Bay is one of the most important coastal mangrove reserves in the Kingdom.

From the circular walk around the bay, we came across species both known and unknown to us. A veritable heron heaven, within ten minutes we had seen Grey, Squacco, Striated and Western Reef Heron (in both blue and white morphs), as well as both Great White and Little Egrets. The mud teemed with sandpipers of all varieties, Redshank both Common and Spotted, and Greenshank. As we completed our loop, we spotted the unmistakeable and large shape of a Caspian Tern, which promptly dived into the salt water in front of us, returning to the sky with fish in beak. On return to our hotel, energised to explore the Island further, I committed to research where I might find a wider range of what Bahrain has to offer.

Plate 58. Striated Heron.

Plate 59. Squacco Heron.

Plate 60. Squacco Heron.

Plate 61. Western Reef Heron.

Plate 62. Western Reef Heron (White Morph).

As is often the case when looking for birds in the urban environment, my research led me to a sewage outfall. One of my favourite places to watch wildlife is the Crossness outfall near my home in Southeast London, always brimming with waders and ducks. While the lower Thames marshes that once would have surrounded Crossness have been reduced massively in scale, I was pleasantly surprised to find that Manama's largest sewage outfall at Tubli is surrounded by extensive mangroves. Travelling by taxi to Tubli, I was immediately rewarded with a large flamboyance of Greater Flamingos. I would later return at dusk to find that at 4pm sharp everyday they all take to the skies as one, which is quite a spectacle.

Plate 63. Terek Sandpiper.

Plate 64. Greenshank.

Tubli is a really rewarding place for birding. Grey Heron roost in great numbers along the mangrove edge, while Little Stint, Dunlin and Black-winged Stilt busily dig in the mud, occasionally put up by the resident Marsh Harrier, who regularly surveys the mud looking for easy prey. It is impossible to talk of Tubli without mentioning the constant screeching of hundreds, if not thousands, of Black-headed Gulls, which gather to feed in the nutrient rich waters spilling from the outfall.

At Tubli the human and natural environments mix well, but that is not the case in all of the places I was recommended to visit in my hunt for Bahrain's Birds. Bahair Pool is the last remaining freshwater site on the Island, and I had been told to visit to look for the heron species that had so far eluded me: Little Bittern, Purple Heron and Black-crowned Night Heron. Alas, by the time I got there the diggers had arrived and buildings were popping up. The water was partially drained and the pool devoid of life.

Plate 65. Little Stints.

Plate 66. Curlew Sandpiper.

Plate 67. Dunlin and Little Stints.

Plate 68. Black-winged Stilt.

Plate 69. Black-winged Stilt.

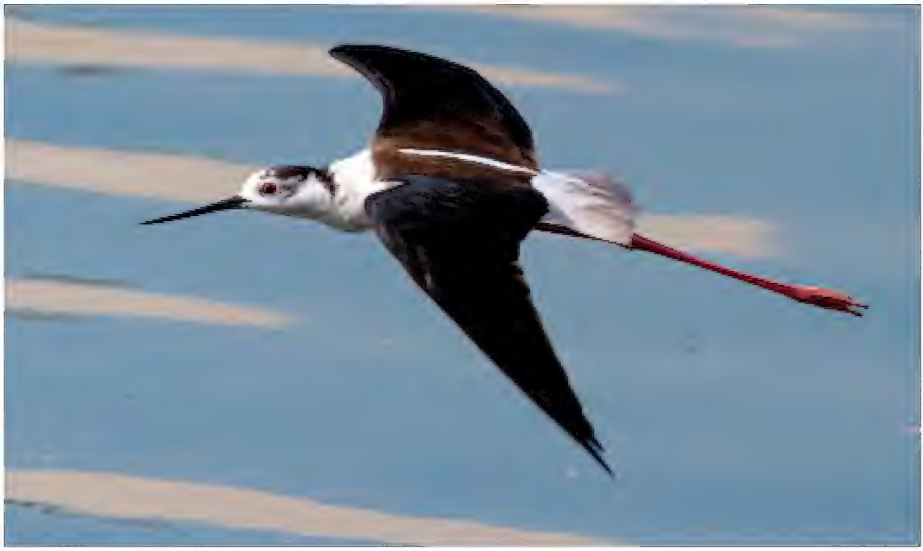

Plate 70. Black-winged Stilt.

It's not all bad news though; the rapid land reclamation is creating new beaches, where gulls, terns and waders throng. White-cheeked, Gull-billed and Caspian Terns are common as well as Slender-billed Gulls, which are everywhere. I was reliably informed while at Bahrain's best birding beach at Busaiteen that I had seen a Heuglin's Gull, a new one to me.

Unfortunately, despite trawling the beaches on most of my days off one bird continued to elude me, the Socotra Cormorant, and by the time I was due to leave Bahrain I had been looking for this bird for nearly three months. Bahrain is home to the only protected nesting colony of these birds in the Arabian Gulf, with more than 30,000 breeding pairs nesting on the Hawar Islands off of the Qatari coast, and I was hoping to visit. Until 2019, a local eco-hotel ran wildlife tours to see the colony. Unfortunately, due to a new development by Accor Hotel Group, which will see a 72-room eco-resort built on the site, the islands are now off limits. With further development of the Hawar Islands restricted and the remainder of the islands designated protected reserves, hopefully the Accor development will just be another example of human and natural demands working in balance in Bahrain.

Plate 71. Slender-billed Gull.

With two days remaining before I was due to leave Bahrain, I was convinced the hunt for a Socotra Cormorant had finally come to an end. Spotting the unmistakable cormorant shape perched on a disused oil pipe in the centre of Eker creek, another fantastic birding spot, I was convinced. Having waded out to get close enough to determine what I was looking at I was dismayed to find only a Great Cormorant staring down at me. I would not see a Socotra Cormorant during my time in the Kingdom. However, I will certainly continue my search should I once more deploy to these surprisingly wonderful islands.

Jack Crowe
Email: jack.s.crowe@gmail.com

Appendix

Scientific names of birds mentioned in the text

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*
Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*
Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*
Squacco Heron *Ardea ralloides*
Striated Heron *Butorides striata*
Western Reef Heron *Egretta gularis*
Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*
Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*
Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*
Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*
Little Stint *Calidris minuta*
Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferrugina*
Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*
Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*
Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*
Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*
Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*
Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*
White-cheeked Tern *Sterna repressa*
Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*
Slender-billed Gull *Chroicocephalus genei*
Heuglin's Gull *Larus heuglini*
Socotra Cormorant *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis*
Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*
Great White Egret *Egretta alba*
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Plate 72. Port Stanley waterfront. © *C Moorey*

A return to the Falkland Islands

by Commander C Moorey

(Photographs by Andrew Miller, except where indicated)

Having rounded off my time in the Royal Navy with three years in Turkey, I returned to the UK very much looking forward to the less exotic delights of birdwatching in the shires of England. However, when my wife spotted an advertisement for the post of Head of the Falkland Islands Maritime Authority, we both felt the draw of these splendid islands where we, with our two boys, had so enjoyed living some 15 years earlier. So here we are, back in Stanley and looking forward to the next four years.

Plate 73. Gentoo Penguins.

As is the case everywhere, Stanley has changed in many ways since we left, mainly in that it has grown significantly in size, and the population has become larger and more diverse. There have always been significant St. Helenian and Chilean minorities, and they have now been joined by sizeable communities from Zimbabwe and the Philippines. The details of the latest census were recently published and included the impressive statistic that 86 different nationalities are now represented in the islands. Thanks to the Zimbabweans and their de-mining work, the beaches and coves that were still closed due to landmines during our last stint down here are now all open, giving free access to nearby gems such as Yorke Bay and its breeding colonies of Gentoo Penguin

Pygoscelis papua and Magellanic Penguin *Spheniscus magellanicus*, with King Penguin *Aptenodytes patagonicus* also regularly visiting the site. One has to go further afield - but not that far - to see the remaining two penguin species that breed in the Falklands: Southern Rockhopper Penguin *Eudyptes chrysocome* and Macaroni Penguin *Eudyptes chrysolophus*.

Plate 74. Magellanic Penguins.

Plate 75. King Penguins.

All that said about the changes, the ambiance of Stanley has not altered much at all, and the place has the same atmosphere and close-knit spirit that we remembered so fondly; not much, good or bad, goes unnoticed for long here!

As this is the first of hopefully several articles for *Sea Swallow* over the next few years, I thought it best to start with a simple review of the more familiar birds seen on a daily basis when out and about in the Stanley area - those birds that someone stepping off a cruise ship for a day might reasonably expect to see. I also thought it worthwhile providing an update on the work of *Falklands Conservation*, a non-governmental organization working to protect the wildlife in the Falkland Islands for future generations - but more on that later.

Although very well known for its seabirds, those less familiar with the islands may be surprised at the variety and number of land birds that call this remote archipelago in the deep South Atlantic home. Many species of land bird resident in the Falkland Islands are endemic subspecies but, for the sake of brevity, this article will merely summarise. At the top of the food chain, one cannot miss the significant numbers of Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura* evident throughout the town (which was granted city status by Her Late Majesty during her Platinum Jubilee), whilst other raptors regularly seen include Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*, Variable Hawk *Geranoaetus polyosoma* and Southern Caracara *Caracara plancus*. My walk to work down from my home on Sapper Hill (a new part of Stanley that did not exist when we were last in the Falklands) is invariably brightened up by the presence and calls of the resplendent Long-tailed Meadowlark *Leistes loyca* and Austral Thrush *Turdus falcklandii*, along with regular appearances by Dark-faced Ground Tyrant *Muscisaxicola maclovianus*, White-bridled Finch *Melanodera melanodera* and Black-chinned Siskin *Spinus barbatus*. One does not have to wander far from Stanley before finding three more resident land birds in the adjacent coastal dunes and grassland: Sedge Wren *Cistothorus platensis*, Blackish Cinclodes *Cinclodes antarcticus* (known locally as 'Tussacbird' and treated as endemic by some authorities) and Correndera Pipit *Anthus correndera.*

Plate 76. Sedge Wren.

Plate 77. Long-tailed Meadow Lark.

Plate 78. Black-chinned Siskins.

Plate 79. Dark-faced Ground Tyrant.

Turning to water birds, once my walk to work reaches the town and continues alongside Stanley Harbour, I have to negotiate my way past waterfowl (mostly in pairs) resting up on the harbourside footpath and sometimes reluctant to give way to passing humans: mainly Upland Goose *Chloephaga picta*, Kelp Goose *Chloephaga hybrida*, along with Crested Duck *Lophonetta specularioides* and the flightless (and endemic) Falkland Steamer Duck *Tachyeres brachypterus*. If the tide is low, there are usually a few Magellanic Oystercatcher *Haematopus leucopodus* and one or two Blackish Oystercatcher *Haematopus ater* working the exposed rocks and mud, whilst Imperial Cormorant *Phalacrocorax atriceps,* Rock Shag *Phalacrocorax magellanicus*, Black-crowned night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* and, in the Austral Winter, Snowy Sheathbill *Chionis albus,* all jostle for space on the wrecks and other derelict

Plate 80. Patagonian Crested Duck.

Plate 81. Falkland Flightless Steamerduck.

Plate 82. Blackish Oystercatcher.

structures in the harbour. Any observer of the harbour will also enjoy the sight of seabirds riding (very often battling) the winds over the harbour, with the usual contenders being a mix of Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus*, Brown Skua *Stercorarius antarcticus*, Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus*, Dolphin Gull *Leucophaeus scoresbii*, the less frequent Brown-hooded Gull *Chroicocephalus maculipennis* and South American Tern *Sterna hirundinacea*.

Plate 83. South American Tern.

Plate 84. Giant Petrel.

Moving out of Stanley, one of the best vantage points for a spot of sea-watching is Cape Pembroke, less than 15-minutes' drive away. Any visit there reminds me that, after 50 years of birdwatching, I really should equip myself with a half-decent telescope but, thankfully, at breeding time, the Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophris* and Sooty Shearwater *Ardenna grisea* are very obliging in presenting themselves closer inshore, such that even my 12 × 50s are up to the job!

Plate 85. Black-browed Albatross.

Beyond the day-to-day birding experiences one of the advantages of living in a windswept archipelago 300 miles off the South American landmass is that waifs and strays can turn up with pleasing regularity. I was not over- impressed that I left the *Narrows Bar* just before word arrived there that there was a lone Chinstrap Penguin *Pygoscelis antarcticus* at Cape Pembroke - but I have since had the joy of catching up with other notable vagrants, such as Fork-tailed Flycatcher *Tyrannus savana*, Wilson's Phalarope *Steganopus tricolor* and Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*.

I now round off with a quick update on the work of *Falklands Conservation*, which undertakes practical conservation projects, surveys and scientific studies, monitors seabird populations, rehabilitates oiled penguins and publishes material on many aspects of the Falkland Islands environment.

A key pillar of the organization is community involvement, working within the community to engage and raise awareness of the work that *Falklands Conservation* does, including community events, volunteering opportunities, collaboration with schools and other groups, and running a youth membership scheme, the *Watch Group*. In addition, under a 'citizen science' scheme, the organization is training members of the local community to survey for whales, dolphins and porpoises in the inshore waters of the Falkland Islands - and 'citizen scientists' are also researching the distribution of some important seaweed species.

Falklands Conservation has four priority areas which it sees as being vitally important to the long-term health and wellbeing of the natural environment of the Falkland Islands: Land Management, Marine Management, Development and Biosecurity. For a greater understanding of the valuable work being done under these high-level headings, it is well worth paying a visit to the *Falklands Conservation* website: https://falklandsconservation.com.

For the purposes of this article, amongst the rich material within the website, I would highlight the organization's recent project focused on Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) for seabirds, which culminated, in April 2022, in the confirmation of Falkland Islands' inshore waters as KBAs for nine seabird species: Black-browed Albatross, Slender-billed Prion *Pachyptila belcheri*, Southern Giant Petrel, Gentoo Penguin, Southern Rockhopper Penguin, Brown Skua, Dolphin Gull, Falklands Steamer Duck and Sooty Shearwater.

I will conclude by re-iterating that I am expecting to be based here in the Falkland Islands for at least another three years, with lots to look forward to - and please get in contact if you are paying these wonderful islands a visit!

Chris Moorey
Email: chrismoorey0@gmail.com

Plate 86. Caspian Tern.

A Hong Kong tern year

by John Holmes

(All photographs by the author)

COVID-19 related restrictions in the past couple of years have narrowed the birding horizons of even the most dedicated of birders.

Hong Kong is a 1,000 km² Special Administrative Region of China, overlooking the South China Sea, and our horizons have been narrower than those of many. But being in a position just inside the tropics and being on the East Asian /Australasian Flyway, we are fortunate to have many species of terns which can be seen at varying times of the year, either at sea, or - in rough weather - over the wetlands in and around Deep Bay, next to the well-known Mai Po Nature Reserve in Hong Kong's northwest.

This article is intended as a simple outline of which tern species we in Hong Kong can expect to see and at what time of the year.

The world's largest species of tern, Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*, can be observed in ones and twos throughout the winter months at Mai Po. The example shown (Plate 86) was photographed in February over the mudflats of Deep Bay.

In early spring - from March and through April, Gull-billed Terns *Gelochelidon nilotica* appear around the shores of Deep Bay, zipping fast and low to catch small crabs on the sand flats exposed by newly-fallen tides (Plate 87).

Plate 87. Gull-billed Tern.

Plate 88. Whiskered Terns.

April is the peak of spring wader migration, but Whiskered Terns *Chlidonias hybrida* are not seen until the end of the month, sometimes with flocks of dozens around the edges of commercial fish ponds (Plate 88). Like HK's other 'marsh' tern (White-winged) many will be in breeding plumage in this season.

White-winged Terns *Chlidonias leucopterus* are often seen together with Whiskered Terns, but numbers of these peak slightly later, in early May. The migrating birds seen here are hunting over small fish driven to the sea surface by Bluefin Tuna in the open sea south of Hong Kong (Plate 89).

Plate 89. White-winged Terns.

Spring passage also sees many Common Terns *Sterna hirundo* with both the Siberian form *longipennis* and mainland form *tibetana* seen resting on or taking off from pieces of flotsam (Plates 90 & 91).

Aleutian Tern *Onychoprion aleuticus*, first identified in Hong Kong waters in 1992, is a charismatic bird of both spring and autumn passage. Shown is an individual in flight showing the distinctive narrow black band at the tip of the secondaries (Plate 92).

Plate 90. Common Tern, mainland form.

Plate 91. Common Tern, Siberian form.

Plate 92. Aleutian Tern.

Plate 93. Little Tern.

Little Terns *Sternula albifrons* breed on a few remote beaches in Guangdong Province (neighbouring HK), and these, too, are a feature of migrating mixed tern flocks in late spring. The individual shown was photographed on the mudflats of Deep Bay (Plate 93).

A highlight of the hot, humid summers is the presence of three breeding species on the rocky coasts of the east and south: Roseate *Sterna dougallii*, Black-naped *S. Sumatrana* and Bridled Terns *Onychoprion anaethetus*. (Plates 94, 95, 96 & 97).

Plate 94. Roseate Tern.

Plate 95. Black-naped Tern.

Plate 96. Bridled Terns.

Plate 97. Bridled Tern pair.

All three of these species can easily be viewed in June and July from the Public Ferry that runs between Tap Mun Island and Wong Shek Pier, in Sai Kung Country Park, to the delight of birders and photographers alike.

In August 2021 we were treated to the rare sight of an Eden's Whale *Balaenoptera edeni edeni* in Mirs Bay, to the northeast of Hong Kong. Locally-breeding Bridled and Black-naped Terns are seen here, hunting sprats forced to the surface by the whale (Plate 98).

Plate 98. Eden's Whale, with Bridled and Black-naped Terns.

In August and September Great Crested Terns *Thalasseus bergii,* with a high proportion of juveniles, are seen off the coast after dispersing from their eastern China island colonies. More Common Terns appear during rough weather at this time, too (Plates 99, 100 & 101).

Plate 99. Great Crested Terns.

Plate 100. Great Crested Tern.

Plate 101. Common Tern.

Plate 102. Sooty Tern.

Summer Tropical Storms can drive Sooty Terns *Onychoprion fuscatus* closer to shore, with almost all of HK's dozen-or-so records (as of 2022) being of juvenile birds (Plate 102). There is also one record of Black Noddy *Anous minutus* and a few records of Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* following summer tropical storms (Plates 103 & 104).

Plate 103. Brown Noddy.

Plate 104. Black Noddy.

Plate 105. Chinese Crested Tern.

Finally, a shot of a much-anticipated 'possible' addition to the Hong Kong Tern List, Chinese Crested Tern *Thalasseus bernsteini,* seen here with Great Crested Terns on a beach in the Min River estuary in Fujian Province, about 500 km to Hong Kong's northeast (Plate 105). This Critically Endangered species was rediscovered on islands just off the east China coast in 2000 after going unseen for years. Since returning to the world's birding radar 20 years ago, sporadic sightings of Chinese Crested Tern have been made, both in eastern China and on wintering grounds in Indonesia.

For Hong Kong seabirders, Chinese Crested Tern remains a top target bird, being enigmatic, rare and tantalisingly close.

John Holmes
Email: johnjemi@gmail.com

Scotland's remote seabird islands

by Simon Cook

(All photographs by the author)

During May of 2022 Noble Caledonia's small expedition cruise ship MV *Ocean Nova* spent time in the Inner and Outer Hebrides, Orkney, Fair Isle and Shetland, with calls at several remote and seldom-visited islands. After leaving Plymouth and on the way to Scotland, the ship stopped at St. Agnes and Tresco in the Isles of Scilly, Lundy in the Bristol Channel, Skomer off southwest Wales, Holyhead on Anglesey, sailed past the Calf of Man and stopped at Rathlin Island, Co. Antrim. This article concentrates on some of the lesser-known Scottish islands, several of which are mentioned in Boak, *Sea Swallow* 70: 63–65.

There were three consecutive cruises and the weather, which is so important when visiting isolated and exposed islands, was varied. During the first cruise the weather was very settled, with calm seas and lots of sunshine. The other two were notable for being cold, wet and windy, with often choppy sea conditions. As a result, at some places, like Papa Stour, Foula and the Lagavulin whisky distillery on Islay, sea conditions prevented landings, although scout boats were deployed to assess the conditions.

Figure 1. Map showing the remote places decribed in this article. © *Google Earth*

Plate 106. *Ocean Nova*, Fair Isle.

Ailsa Craig, Firth of Forth

This huge circular, conical lump of an island, which rises to 338 m, looks just like a volcano. Lying in the Firth of Clyde and to the south of the Isle of Arran, it is famous for being the source of the granite used for making curling stones. Remains of the quarrying activities are easily seen. *Ocean Nova* approached in the early morning over a glassy sea and under a sunny sky. After breakfast the Zodiacs were lowered, filled and sent off on a slow circumnavigation of the island but not before a Purple Sandpiper flew around the ship. (See *Appendix 1* for a species list with scientific names). In the calm conditions it was very easy to see three undemonstrative Harbour Porpoise, intent on finding their next meal.

There were lots of Razorbills and Common Guillemots, with about 60 of the attractive Black Guillemot scattered along the rocky shoreline together with a few Puffins and a single Fulmar. Kittiwake, Herring and both Lesser and Great Black-backed Gulls were present, as were 30–40 Common Eider. The star bird and the one that was present in thousands, was Northern Gannet. Many were sitting on the water and, with a slow, quiet and careful approach, they could be seen at very close quarters. Their golden heads glowed in the sunshine but their beady eyes and dagger-like bills gave them a somewhat menacing look. We had been watching an approaching trawler with its net out, which had hundreds of gannets behind it so when it got closer to us our boats headed off towards it. The spectacle of so many of these impressive birds following the boat and plunging into the sea astern of it was a highlight for everyone.

Plate 107. Eiders, Ailsa Craig.

Plate 108. Common Guillemots, Ailsa Craig.

Plate 109. Gannet, Ailsa Craig.

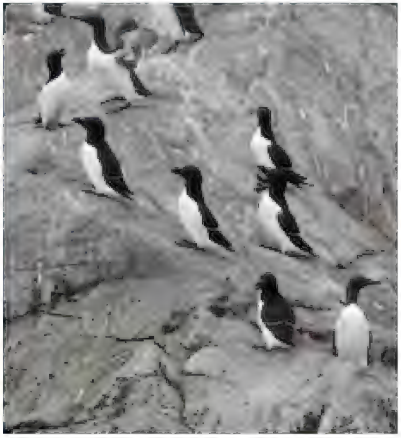

Plate 110. Razorbills and Guillemots, Ailsa Craig.

Plate 111. Gannets, Ailsa Craig.

Plate 112. Gannets, Sule Stack.

Sule Stack and Sule Skerry

Lying to the north-northeast of Cape Wrath and to the west of the Orkney Islands, these two places get very few visitors. The stack is inhospitable to people but the skerry is much larger, about 40 acres in area and low lying.

Only one visit was made to these remote outposts, on 5 May. Rough seas had meant that plans to land on Handa Island were cancelled, thus giving us time to go ship-cruising instead. During a slow sail-by several thousand Gannets were seen on and around the stack but no other species were seen. Nearby Sule Skerry has some vegetation so more species were seen. There is also a lighthouse, together with associated buildings. On the approach a Redshank flew past the ship, on its way to the island. There were several thousand Gannets and several hundred Common Guillemots. Terns might have been expected but none were seen. The following additional species were noted: Puffin (five), Fulmar (two), Kittiwake (two), Shag (two), and a single Great Black-backed Gull and Great Skua. European Storm-petrels and Puffins are said to breed in quite large numbers, and Leach's Storm-petrel is believed to breed there.

Plate 113. Gannets, Sule Skerry.

Shiant Islands

This group of uninhabited but seabird-rich islands lie in The Minch, almost within sight of Stornoway, in the Outer Hebrides. On the way there from the harbour both Red-throated and Great Northern Divers were seen, as well as a second winter/sub-adult Golden Eagle. During the afternoon we were out in the boats for two hours, marvelling at the wealth of birdlife. The most obvious birds were Puffins. At some places like Fair Isle and Sumburgh Head, Shetland this species was once common and easy to see but now the reverse is true. However, at the Shiants, as at St. Kilda, there were thousands and thousands of them. Sometimes, with a cautious approach, very good views can be had of these charismatic birds and here we were lucky to see them on a calm day.

Plate 114. Approaching the Shiants.

Another common bird was Guillemot, and where there is food, there are diners. Here they were in the form of White-tailed Eagles, at least ten of them. There was a mixture of adults and not-so-old birds and in flight their huge wings made them look like proverbial barn doors. There were times when there were several in the air together. With so many auks and eagles, it was more like being at the colony in Norway's Lofoten Islands than one in Scotland. There were small numbers of Razorbill and Kittiwake, a few Common Eider and a few fairly approachable Shags. Just one Rock Pipit was seen, plus a Common Sandpiper, also on rocks. More expected in this habitat was Purple Sandpiper, four of which were seen. They were probably among the last of their species to leave Britain for the Arctic.

Plate 115. Going ashore, Shiant Islands.

Plate 116. White-tailed Eagle, Shiant Islands.

Plate 117. Great Northern Diver.

Plate 118. Shags, Shiant Islands.

Barra and Mingulay

Barra can be reached by Caledonian MacBrayne ferry but Mingulay takes a bit more effort for general visitors to reach. On a morning in late May the ship docked in Castlebay, Barra, for a short shore excursion. No seabirds were seen but Redpoll was an addition to the species list. A Cuckoo was heard, as were two Corn Crakes. Even though I was only a few feet from one of the latter I never even saw the thistles it was in so much as twitch.

Plate 119. Ringed Plover, Fair Isle.

The landing on Mingulay was tricky - too much surf on the beach necessitated an awkward landing on a sloping rock shelf. However, everyone made it safely and we were then able to wander off and explore. Further along the beach there were several hundred Grey Seals on the sand and beyond them, on the water, there were hundreds of Puffins; a walk along the clifftops failed to reveal any ashore though. Landbird highlights were four Twite, a pair of Ringed Plovers with four fluffy chicks and yet another unseen Corn

Crake. When we landed it was sunny but clouds soon gathered and it then started to rain. This set the pattern for the rest of the day when, once back aboard, we set off to do some 'scenic cruising'. It was raining, the visibility was poor and the sea was choppy as the ship sailed carefully through the narrow sound between Mingulay and Berneray. I am sure that seabirds must breed here but only a few gulls were seen. What we did see, just, was the clifftop lighthouse at Barra Head, the southernmost point of the Outer Hebrides.

St. Kilda

This isolated island group is all that remains above the sea of a large volcano, active some 60 million years ago. Hirta has the highest sea cliff in the British Isles at Conachair (1,400 ft/376 m), while Stac an Armin is the highest sea stack in Britain (191 m). With huge numbers of seabirds and a special human and cultural heritage, the islands are one of only 24 places in the world to have 'double' World Heritage Status. In 1975 the islands were given to the National Trust for Scotland and were declared a National Nature Reserve.

St. Kilda has a reputation for being difficult to land on and in spite of my many years of cruising, was my first time at the island group. Much has previously been written about the island of Hirta and its people, who famously finally gave up the struggle for survival and were evacuated in 1930. Their village now lies largely empty and derelict, a monument to Man's struggle against the elements. Famous also for immense sea cliffs and hordes of Gannets, I was also relishing the prospect of perhaps seeing the 'resident' Snowy Owl.

Plate 120. Hirta Village, Hirta, St. Kilda.

Plate 121. Great Skua, St. Kilda.

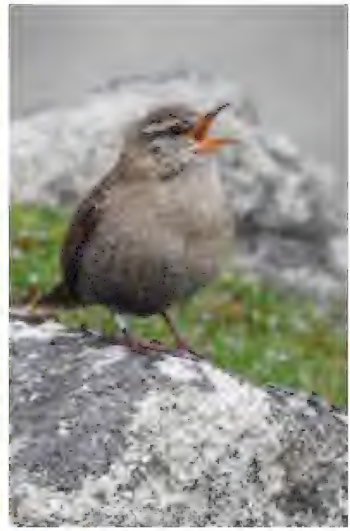

Plate 122. St. Kilda Wren.

During my time on the ship we made three highly successful landings in Village Bay on Hirta; three months later my wife and I landed from a small boat from the Outer Hebrides. Around and above the village there were a few Arctic Skuas and more numerous Great Skuas, mostly seen in the air. On the first visit, shorebird migrants included a Purple Sandpiper, a few Ruddy Turnstone and eight Whimbrel, while the only landbird migrant was a single Redwing, seen on the edge of the village. On the second visit there was a Collared Dove and on the third I found a Sedge Warbler. The most interesting bird for me was the local Wren, a very distinct sub-species. A PhD student told me that there were sufficient differences for it to be a potential full species. Six were seen and, with their characteristic loud song, the males were very easy to track down during May. However, on the early September visit, not a single one was either seen or heard. On Hirta it is thought that there are just over 100 pairs.

Of the owl there was no sign on either of the first two visits. There were rumours that it had been spooked by an over-zealous film crew. Perhaps to encourage me, a couple of my colleagues told me that in 2021 as the ship drew into Village, the owl was sitting on the roof of the church, so maybe third time lucky... That proved to be the case, although she was distant and was seen in pouring rain. At one point she seemed to be conversing with a Raven that had landed on the stone wall beside her. On our second visit, on the rocky south side of the island of Dun, we were surprised to see a solitary Whooper Swan. On our next visit it was around the corner, in Village Bay. During a lull in ferrying people to and from the ship I cautiously approached the bird, which was calling softly and repeatedly. A colleague later told me that he had seen a dead one ashore so it would seem that the survivor was pining for its lost mate, a possible early victim of the devastating bird flu outbreak.

Plate 123. Snowy Owl and Raven, St. Kilda.

Plate 124. Snipe, Hirta.

Plate 125. Fulmar, St. Kilda.

Plate 126. Starling, Hirta.

Once each landing at the village was over, we would set off in the Zodiacs around the other side of the bay, along the north shore of Dun. On the slopes above us there was a huge colony of Puffins, many thousands of them. They could be seen on the ground, in the air and on the water too and they made quite a sight in the sunshine. Once we were all back on board, the ship would turn to starboard out of Village Bay, sail up the southern side of Dun, past Soay to the cliff-girt island of Boreray and its two rock stacks, Stac Lee and Stac an Armin. All three were covered in Gannets and a colleague who had been visiting for some years said that she thought that numbers had increased to the extent that it may now be Britain's largest Gannet colony. (I saw Britain's newest colony, off the north coast of Anglesey, in early June.) The sight of so many birds was special for everyone aboard.

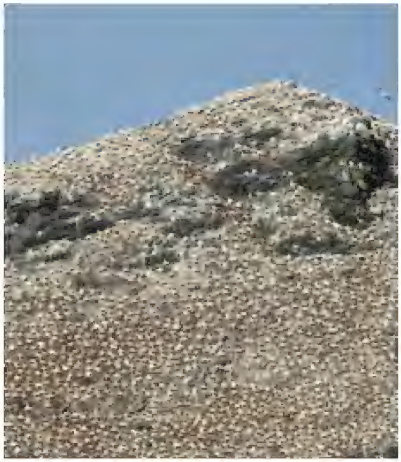

Plate 127. Gannets, Stac Lee.

Plate 128. Stac Lee & Stac an Armin.

On one visit a lot were fighting and struggling over a long length of orange nylon twine for their nests. With the danger to the birds of entanglement, the captain very slowly and expertly eased the ship up to the twine, and the chief officer retrieved the twine from the water, to much applause. After leaving St. Kilda on one of the visits the ship passed among the remote Flannan Islands, whose three lighthouse keepers mysteriously disappeared without a trace in December 1900.

Plate 129. Gannets fighting over twine.

Plate 130. Dolphins, The Minch.

Other highlights

The north-western British Isles are spectacular and rich in wildlife so there was a lot to look out for and a lot was seen. But the notable sightings started in the far southwest of Britain and continued to the northernmost of our islands, Unst, Shetland. Some of the highlights included doing 'guiding' in the Turks Head on St. Agnes, Red Squirrels and a male Golden Pheasant on Tresco, breeding-plumaged Great Northern Divers from Scilly to Shetland, a Purple Sandpiper on the ship near Anglesey, Irish Hares on Rathlin Island, Barn Owl and Hen Harrier seen from my Zodiac on Loch Ulva, thousands of Manx Shearwaters off Rum, lots of cetaceans in The Minch, off Stornoway, a Red Knot in breeding plumage, the rare Scottish Primrose, Otter and Killer Whales at Unst and, finally, a glimpse of a Corncrake on Iona, where my wife and I were married aboard *MV Clipper Adventurer*, after having met in Antarctica and getting engaged by a flamingo lake in the shadow of the mighty Volcan Licancabur, on Bolivia's altiplano.

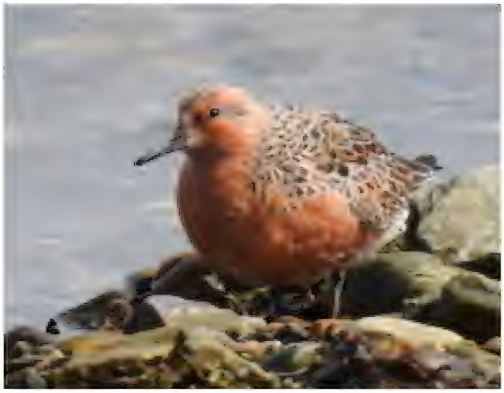

Plate 131. Red Knot, Orkney.

Plate 132. Dunlins, Fair Isle.

Plate 133. Fulmars and *Ocean Nova*.

One of my most eagerly anticipated visits was to the Lagavulin distillery, the producer of my favourite (peaty) whisky. However, when we arrived it was obvious that we would not be able to get the passengers ashore, due to a very strong onshore wind and a two-metre chop. I was the 'designated driver' for the staff boat, which was despatched to collect samples for a tasting session back aboard. On the return to the ship, laden with precious whisky and heading slowly straight into the waves, I was able to keep everyone dry. The expedition leader said that was no good though, for we had told everyone that it was too rough to go ashore so we couldn't possibly arrive back at the ship bone dry. I was duly instructed to get us wet, so by accelerating slightly and getting the timing right I managed to dig the bow of the zodiac into a wave and we all got satisfactorily soaked. One of my dripping colleagues in the bow shouted, "That'll do!"

Simon Cook
Email: cookbirder@hotmail.com

Appendix

List of species mentioned in the text

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*
Common Eider *Somateria mollissima*
Golden Pheasant *Chrysolophus pictus*
Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*
Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*
Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*
Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*
European Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*
Leach's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*
Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*
Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*
White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*
Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*
Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*
Corn Crake *Crex crex*
Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*
Red Knot *Calidris canutus*
Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*
Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*
Redshank *Tringa tetanus*
Whimbrel *Numenius phacopus*
Great Skua *Stercorarius skua*
Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*
Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*
Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*
Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*
Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*
Puffin *Fratercula arctica*
Black Guillemot *Cepphus grylle*
Common Guillemot *Uria aalge*
Razorbill *Alca torda*

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*
Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*
Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiacus*
Barn Owl *Tyto alba*
Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus*
Redwing *Turdus iliacus*
Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*
Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes hirtensis*
Raven *Corvus corax*
Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*
Common Redpoll *Carduelis flammea*

Killer Whale *Orcinus orca*
Harbour Porpoise *Phocoena phocoena*
Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus*
Otter *Lutra lutra*
Irish Hare *Lepus timidus*
Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris*
Scottish Primrose *Primula scotica*

Plate 134. Gannets - bird second from right with black eyes.

Postscript

Scottish postscript - black-eyed Gannets

In May this year I was once again on *MV Ocean Nova* on British Isles cruises, and as before visits were made to various gannetries: Grassholm, Ailsa Craig, St. Kilda, Fair Isle, Noss and Sula Sgeir. Following the devasting outbreak of avian influenza which erupted in 2022, from visual observations it appeared that gannet numbers were down by perhaps 60%.

Whilst reading an on-line copy of *The Guardian* a colleague came across an article about Gannets with black irises on Bass Rock, Firth of Forth. They had first been noticed in June 2022, and researchers took blood samples from 18 apparently healthy adult gannets with both normal and black irises. The samples were tested for bird flu antibodies and eight tested positive, of which seven had black irises. The conclusion was that the pale blue irises of Gannets mostly turn black if they survive avian influenza. Why this happens has yet to be determined.

Shortly after this, on our visit to Fair Isle, we cruised beside the Gannet colony on Sheep Rock, on the eastern side of the island. That evening I went through my photographs and lo and behold found a bird with black eyes! It wasn't easy to see through binoculars from a moving boat, but photography confirmed it, and is perhaps the best way of locating these flu-resistant birds. Although overall numbers have undoubtedly been severely reduced by avian flu, there is added hope now that numbers will recover.

Plate 135. Gannets - the same bird in close-up.

As a further postscript, until fairly recently at St. Kilda, Gannets nested only on the two large rock stacks (Stac Lee and Stac an Armin) off the coast of Boreray. Now they have spread in large numbers to Boreray itself. In terms of numbers of birds, they may now have outstripped those on Bass Rock, which is often said to be our largest colony.

The RNBWS Portland Weekend 28–30 April 2023

by Lieutenant M Hanson, Royal Navy. Megan Hanson, a new member of RNBWS, is a helicopter pilot currently serving in 824 Naval Air Squadron at RNAS Culdrose

(All photographs by Lieutenant J. Crowe Royal Navy)

I suppose the point at which one would say I was into birding was when I decided I was fed up with the well-known (although somewhat loved) phrase 'LBJ' and decided I wanted to know what each of these non-distinct species was. With a little effort, I quickly realised they're not so 'non-distinct' at all. This drove me to get out and find out the name of each small bird, follow up recorded sightings, and meet with other birders.

This brings me to Portland. The weekend was advertised on the RNBWS Facebook page and promised an opportunity to stay in an actual lighthouse (the Old Lower Lighthouse), visit a new place (Portland Bill), meet likeminded people, and get hands-on with the Portland Bird Observatory's conservation efforts with ringing undertaken daily at various sites across Portland.

My partner and I took the plunge. Heading up to Portland from Cornwall, we joined the group for the annual spring weekend, and were greeted very warmly with a glass of wine by the Society's duty sommelier Stephen Chapman before meeting everyone else. Basking in the soft glow of an unseasonably warm spring evening and staring out over a crystal-clear English Channel, we watched the many small birds flitting around the observatory garden. It was clear already that we were in for a special weekend. The evening was rounded off with a meal at the Eight Kings Pub before some of the group went looking for owls with some very nifty thermal scopes, and as we left Mark Cutts invited us to join him ringing in the morning at Culverwell just above the observatory. It would be an early start, with no guarantees of seeing anything much at all owing to the weekend's fine weather but still an exciting prospect for us newbies.

Plate 136. Whitethroat.

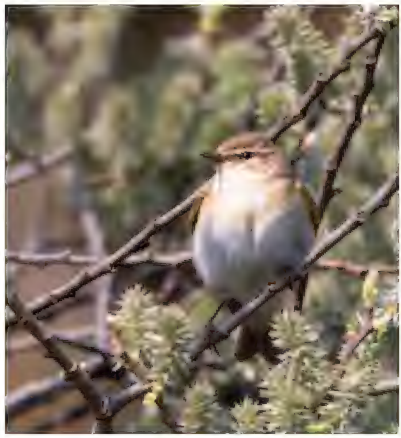

Plate 137. Willow Warbler.

Rising early, we joined Mark and waited to see if anything was caught in his mist nets. Although perhaps not what Mark had hoped for, the few small birds we did see were a real treat for us, seeing up close the processing and ringing of each bird, the careful removal from the nets and placing them in a small cotton bag, before identifying, measuring and weighing each before they were adorned with a small silver ring and released. After the first couple, Mark allowed us to release some of the birds ourselves. Species seen that morning: Dunnock *Prunella modularis* (already ringed), Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*, Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*, Willow Warbler *P trochilus*, Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* and Blackbird *Turdus merula*.

Following breakfast, the group - about twelve in all - had a busy day planned. First, we headed out to RSPB Lodmoor, a reserve in Weymouth consisting of reed bed, open water, salt marsh and wet grassland. There had been whisperings of a pair of Black-winged Stilt *Himanthropus himanthropus* that had taken up residence earlier that week, but they appeared to have moved on by the time we arrived. We did however have a bit of luck when one of the group heard a Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*, whereby a scrabble ensued to spot and confirm the sighting before it ducked back under the bush. Other highlights included: a Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus* beginning to nest build amongst the Common Terns *Sterna hirundo*, a brief glimpse of a Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* overflying the reeds, a Common Gull *Larus canus* masquerading as a juvenile Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*, a Marsh Harrier *Circus aeroginosus* quartering the reserve, and Reed Bunting *Emberiza schloeniclus* and Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* skulking in the rushes. As we walked we saw several butterflies, and with a little help from our fellow members added Orange-tip *Anthocharis cardamines* and Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria* to species we now recognise. Sighted also was an unusual godwit, with none of the typical plumage, which sparked a long debate about whether it might be Bar-tailed *Limosa lapponica* or Black-tailed *L. limosa*. This lasted until our next destination, RSPB Radipole Lake.

Plate 138. Sparrowhawk.

Radipole lake is another RSPB reserve in urban Weymouth, consisting of reed bed and some open water. Refuelling initially at the onsite café and meeting some of the local volunteers from the Observatory, we headed out onto the boardwalks. Stopping for a small shoal of Common Roach *Rutilus rutilus*, we heard the unmistakable call of a Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* which flashed into view only a few metres from the group. Seeing this brought a bit of birding trivia and I now know that Cetti's Warblers

Plate 139. Speckled Wood butterfly.

Plate 140. Cetti's Warbler.

possess only ten tail feathers instead of the usual 12 that most other passerines have. Reaching the end of the path, we sat in the pagoda and watched House Martins *Delichon urbica* ducking and diving onto the surface of the water to catch low flying insects. While returning to the cars an unusual tree was spotted, which sparked a three-week quest from Steve Jones who finally identified it as an Empress (or Foxglove) tree, *Paulownia tomentosa*.

Next up we headed to the Dorset Wildlife Trust Centre at Chesil Beach for Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*. Here we had also the opportunity to watch Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* and Curlew *N. arquata* together, which provided an excellent demonstration of the size and plumage differences, as well as highlighting the two bills. While there we had a call from the Observatory; a Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus* had been spotted near Portland Bill. We all jumped into our cars and headed to some fields north of the lighthouse, and sure enough, a pair of Ring Ouzels had taken up residence with some horses and were busy foraging in the short meadow grass.

Plate 141. Little Terns.

Plate 142. Ring Ouzel.

Plate 143. Black Redstart.

Plate 144. Razorbill.

Sunday allowed those getting on the road to leave at their leisure and importantly for us, an opportunity to explore the local area. Armed with some local knowledge, we headed first down to the Bill, to see what might be spotted on the sea. But before we'd even got that far, we were distracted by a Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*, with its fiery tail, hopping around the base of Portland Bill Lighthouse. We met a sea watcher, who gave us some tips for distinguishing Razorbills *Alca torda* and Guillemots *Uria aalge* in flight from a distance and moved along the cliffs to see them coming into ledges in the cliffs, staying a while to watch them elegantly swoop into the cliffs from the sea to crash rather ungracefully on top of the rest of the colony. We next headed north up the coast, and quickly found ourselves in amongst Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica* cruising up and down the cliff edges, plucking insects from

the air with lethal precision. Several individuals cashed in on our disturbance of the long grass and came within inches to collect any insects we'd put up. Next, following yet another tip from the group, we looked for Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* in one of the farm complexes to the north west of the Observatory. Unfortunately, we had no such luck but did manage to spot a Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* following the local horses as they disturbed unsuspecting invertebrates with their hooves. Our final tip off was for the Bill's famous Little Owls *Athena noctua*, which live in the old quarry very close to the Observatory, and after a little while we spotted one of them taking a nap in the rocks, soaking up the afternoon sun. All in all, across all the sites we visited over the weekend, we saw a grand total of 76 species.

Plate 145. Little Owl.

In addition to this, throughout the weekend the team at the observatory diligently monitored the mist nets in the garden and took time to show us their setup while bringing select species to the patio to ensure everyone was able to see anything interesting up close and personal. This way we got to see Garden *Sylvia borin* and Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus,* and having the difference in these pointed out to us from close proximity was particularly helpful. In addition to mist nets, ground traps were also being used. A Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* was one of the last species we got to see and I had the privilege of releasing it.

Plate 146. Wheatear.

En route home to darkest Cornwall, one final stop had been recommended to us: Yarner Woods National Nature Reserve, a heavily wooded area in East Dartmoor dominated by Sessile Oak *Quercus petraea*, and known for its breeding Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers *Dendrocopus minor*. We'd even been directed to a specific tree. Unfortunately, on arrival it was clear the tree was no longer in use as a nest site and it was suggested by some local birders that high activity the previous week from those wishing to see the nesting pair may have caused them to abandon the site; a reminder to remain responsible when going out and not to disturb those birds we're so keen to see. Fortunately, the trip was not wasted, and while moving around the reserve we did get some fleeting views of a Lesser Spot, identified predominantly by sound, thus proving how invaluable it can be to know what to listen out for. On top of this, we saw a Garden Warbler (which we successfully identified thanks to our experiences at the Observatory), Marsh Tit *Parus palustris*, Pied Flycatcher, Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*, Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata* and a Greater Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopus major*, capping off a really excellent weekend's introduction to the RNBWS.

Megan Hanson
Email: meganjhanson@live.co.uk

Plate 147. Garden Warbler.

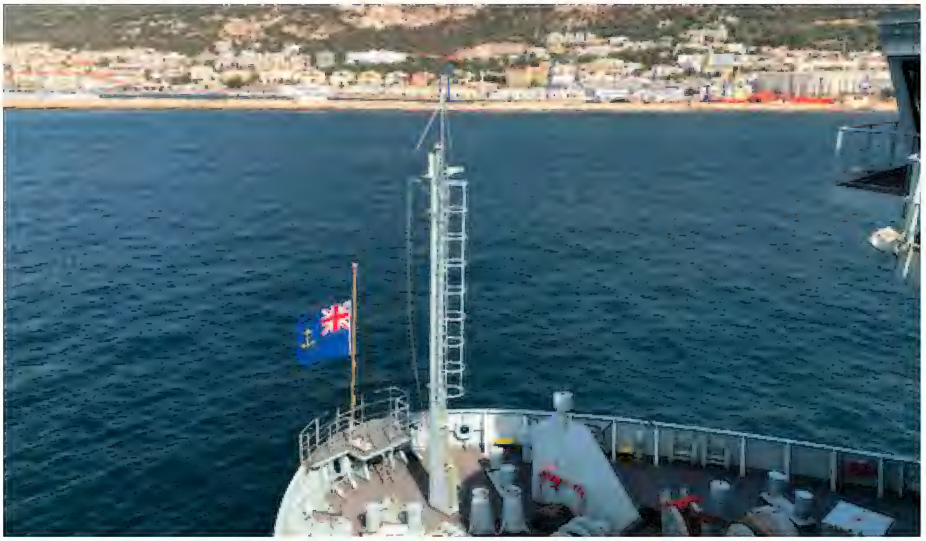

Plate 148. At anchor off Gibraltar, with flag at half mast for the State Funeral, 19 Sep 22.

Birding on RFA *Argus* during passage to Gibraltar

by Warrant Officer A Tindale, BSc

(All photographs by the author)

I am writing this in early 2023 as I come towards the end of what is almost certainly my last seagoing assignment in the Royal Navy. Being part of the Fleet Operational Standards and Training organisation staff has involved visiting deployed ships to provide both engineering assurance and Deployed Readiness Training for units to maintain operational capability. A personal bonus for these trips has been the opportunity to birdwatch. Two years ago I reported on my time in HMS *Prince of Wales* (*Sea Swallow* 70: 59) and last year I was on board HMS *Montrose* in the Gulf (*Sea Swallow* 71: 50). This report is of my time in RFA *Argus* in September 2022.

RFA *Argus* has been modified to perform two roles. She is designed to operate helicopters and is usually used for helicopter training, but she is also a fully equipped hundred-bed hospital ship, on call when required. On this three-month NATO deployment to the Mediterranean she was in the helicopter carrier role, equipped with Merlin and Wildcat helicopters, and formed part of a maritime task group, operating in conjunction with the HMS *Queen Elizabeth* Carrier Strike Group. The overall aim of the deployment was NATO solidarity, and for the first time included participation by NATO's newest member, Montenegro.

During the short transit south from Plymouth to Gibraltar, whenever I was not involved in the delivery of assurance or training serials I was birding on the upper deck, and with autumn migration well underway I was rewarded with several wayward land birds.

These are the land birds I recorded during the passage south:

15 Sep Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* (missing tail)
15 Sep Male Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*
16 Sep Spotted Flycatcher *Musicapa striata*
16 Sep Female Blackcap
16 Sep Female Common Redstart *Phoenicarus phoenicarus*
16 Sep Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*
17 Sep Willow Warbler *Phylloscopos trochilus*
18 Sep Female Common Redstart

Plate 149. a) Blackcap, Bay of Biscay. **b)** Reed Warbler, North Atlantic, NW of Cape Finisterre. **c)** Spotted Flycatcher, North Atlantic, NW of Cape Finisterre. **d)** Willow Warbler, N Atlantic, West of Portugal.

In addition to the expected seabirds such as Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*, Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis* and Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus* I encountered the following as I roamed the upper deck searching for grounded migrants:

15 Sep Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius,* Bay of Biscay. One flew from the surface
15 Sep Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus,* Bay of Biscay. Two singles
15 Sep Storm Petrel (European)*Hydrobates pelagicus,* Bay of Biscay. Eight plus
15 Sep Arctic Skua *Stercocarius parasiticus,* Bay of Biscay. Two, dark & light-phase
18 Sep Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis,* Cape St.Vincent. One
18 Sep Great Skua *Stercocarius skua,* Cape St.Vincent. One

RFA *Argus* passed through the Straits of Gibraltar and anchored in the Bay of Gibraltar early on Monday 19 Sep 22, a day ahead of schedule to enable all on board the opportunity to watch the State Funeral of Queen Elizabeth II. Prior to heading to the mess to watch the television coverage I added to the trip list Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan mauretanicus*, European (Mediterranean) Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*, Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* and a Harrier sp. (most likely Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus,* given the date) in addition to numerous Yellow-legged Gulls *Larus cachinnans.*

Our training team disembarked the following day to enjoy a night in a hotel before the flight back to the UK. After checking in I headed into town and noticed the first of scores of Booted Eagles *Hieroaetus pennatus* drifting effortlessly overhead, bound for Africa. In addition to the Booted Eagles I spotted dozens of Black Kite *Milvus migrans* and a single Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus.* I had intended to walk up to the Jews' Gate Bird Observatory but Engineer Road was unfortunately closed because of roadworks. Therefore, rather than take the longer route via Europa Point, I decided to remain on the lower rock and headed for Alameda Gardens. There I encountered a female Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* in addition to an earlier Spotted Flycatcher, as well as Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala* and regular resident species.

Tony Tindale
Email: treasurer@rnbws.org.uk

Plate 150. Pied Flycatcher in the Alameda Gardens, Gibraltar.

Plate 151. HMS *Scott* alongside in New York. © *MOD*

HMS *Scott* report for 2022–23

by Lt Cdr P Boak
(All photographs by the author)

Introduction

This past year has been a very successful one for HMS *Scott,* the Royal Navy's sole Ocean Survey Vessel. Deployed in mid-Atlantic from July 2022 to July 2023, the ship had the most productive year on record in terms of survey data collected; not bad considering the ship was commissioned over twenty five years ago. We have also learned that *Scott's* life is to be extended, so she'll be gathering valuable data for defence for another ten years.

While deployed, *Scott* made logistics stops roughly every four weeks to take on essential supplies, carry out defect rectification and maintenance, and for crew rotation. The ship is manned in three watches, with two on board and one on rotation leave, and this means the ship can remain on task without having to return to the UK, contributing hugely to the productivity of the vessel. These logistics stops took us to Tenerife in the Canaries, Mindelo in the Cape Verde Islands, Fortaleza in Brazil, St. Lucia in the West Indies, New York City and Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Several of us used these opportunities to get ashore to observe wildlife, including many endemic bird and reptile species. This report will cover the most interesting and exciting moments of the last year, and signpost some of the conservation projects encountered.

Seabirds, land-birds at sea and marine life

While the ship was carrying out core survey tasking mid-Atlantic, and whilst enroute to and from the various ports, we encountered a tremendous variety of marine life. Being a survey vessel, all wildlife sightings have to be recorded, with the data submitted to the UK Hydrographic Office (UKHO). These data are important not only for scientists studying species' distribution and abundance but are also valuable for defence purposes. For example, recording bioluminescence is important in anti-submarine warfare, for in areas of high bioluminescence a submarine periscope would be much more visible at night, and therefore much more vulnerable to visual detection. It is also important to understand the distribution of whales and other large slow-moving marine life, the sonar contacts of which could potentially be mistaken for submarines. In this last respect, the Navy also has important obligations with regards to safeguarding the marine environment, and whenever the use of active sonar is contemplated, a formal Sonar Risk Assessment has to be carried out in order to avoid damage to marine mammals.

Great enjoyment was had too! We had a stunning experience on the passage out to our survey area from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, when a feeding frenzy was observed of at least three basking sharks, a dozen humpback whales and hundreds of common dolphins.

In terms of seabirds, various species of shearwater were encountered, including Cape Verde Shearwaters *Calonectris edwardsii*, Great Shearwaters *Ardenna gravis* and Cory's Shearwaters *Calonectris borealis*. For us rather inexperienced observers, these fast-flying seabirds initially presented something of an identification challenge. However, digital photography made a real difference, for the key features could be inspected at leisure and even a blurred photograph assisted with identification; an example was the dark bill of the Great Shearwater.

Plate 152. Cape Verde Shearwaters.

Other seabird species observed at sea included Brown Boobies *Sula leucogaster* and as the ship crossed the equator enroute to Fortaleza Brazil, Red-footed Boobies *Sula sula*. Both species used the ship's foremast to take the occasional rest. They would also fly alongside the ship's bow wave, watching for emerging flying-fish, which they would swoop upon and pluck out of the air. Such antics provided a welcome interest for the bridge team, who would invariably support the booby. Not all would go the way of the birds however, for in the southern hemisphere they were often harried by Magnificent Frigatebirds *Fregata magnificens*, which would attempt to make the boobies disgorge their hard-earned meal.

With the ship predominantly operating mid-Atlantic, the usual land birds which might be blown out or lost on migration were limited. However, during December 2022, an unusually large number of Cattle Egrets *Bubulcus ibis* landed onboard. Another notable encounter involved a Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*, which was spotted perching upon the port bridge wing pelorus (gyro compass repeat). The surprised bridge team managed to grab the camera and get several photographs as the owl took off and circled around the ship, before disappearing into the distance.

Tenerife, Canary Islands

HMS *Scott* visited Tenerife both at the beginning and end of the deployment. The ship's company had time to explore the island, and we were reminded of the previous visits by HM Ships, especially HMS *Challenger* which visited during the famous expedition of 1872–1876. That nineteenth century expedition was a scientific endeavour that many today consider to be the foundation of modern oceanography, carrying out research that *Scott* continues to this day. The Canary Islands are home to several endemic bird species and sub-species; and spare time was well utilised exploring the islands in search of these endemics. On Tenerife, highlights included searching for the Tenerife Blue Chaffinch *Fringilla teydea* on the slopes of Mount Teide (Spain's highest peak at 3,715 m), as well as the Tenerife Goldcrest *Regulus regulus teneriffae*, Canary Islands Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus canariensis* and the Laurel Pigeon *Columba junoniae*. A trip across to Gran Canaria was rewarded with sightings of the Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch *Fringilla polatzeki*, recently split as a separate species, and Bolle's Pigeon *Columba bollii*. It was heartening to learn about the conservation work to help increase the population of the Blue Chaffinch, which is markedly different in appearance and behaviour from its cousin inhabiting the island of Tenerife[1]. The list of Canary Islands endemic birds was completed on a visit to Fuerteventura in order to observe the Canary Islands Stonechat *Saxicola dacotiae*. A highlight of Fuerteventura was looking for sub-fossil remains of the extinct Dune Shearwater *Puffinus holeae,* when after several hours of searching in the baking heat of the desert landscape, the remains of an egg were located, preserved in a collapsed burrow. Much more complete (and better!) specimens of this shearwater can be seen in the Tenerife Natural History Museum.

Plate 153. (left) Tenerife Blue Chaffinch; **(right)** Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch.

[1] https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339954306_Project_to_increase_range_and_Population_size_of_the_priority_species_Gran_Canaria_Blue_Chaffinch_Fringilla_polatzeki_Layman_Report_of_LIFEPINZON_LIFE14_NATES000077

Plate 154. Male Canary Islands Stonechat.

Plate 155. Dune Shearwater egg.

Aside from birds, the Canary Islands host a remarkable diversity of reptiles, including several giant lizard species. Whilst on Gran Canaria, the endemic Giant Lizard *Gallotia stehlini* was readily observable, but whilst locally common these lizards are vulnerable to predation, particularly from domestic cats. Indeed, the El Hierro Giant Lizard *Gallotia simonyi machadoi* on this westernmost island of the Canaries is critically endangered, and subject to a dedicated conservation programme.

Plate 156. Gran Canaria Giant Lizard.

Cape Verde

Cape Verde was the second main stop of the deployment, when *Scott* proceeded alongside at Mindelo on the island of São Vicente. The archipelago consists of at least ten volcanic islands, home to several endemic bird species including the critically endangered Raso Lark *Alauda razae*, Cape Verde Warbler *Acrocephalus brevipennis* and Iago Sparrow *Passer iagoensis*. However, poor inter-island transport and limited time available during our visit meant we saw just the sparrow.

An interesting opportunity was offered during a period of about a week when the ship anchored off the capital, Praia, awaiting stores. At night the anchor lights and deck-lights remained on in compliance with the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, and these lights attracted a large number of moths. These included the impressive Vine Hawk-moth *Hippotion Celerio*, Convolvulus Hawk-moth *Agrius convolvuli*, as well as a Praying Mantis *Mantis religiosa*. Rounds of the upper-deck at night were certainly made much more interesting when the ship was functioning as a giant moth-trap!

Plate 157. Convolvulus Hawk-moth, at anchor off Cape Verde.

Plate 158. Vine Hawk-moth, at anchor off Cape Verde.

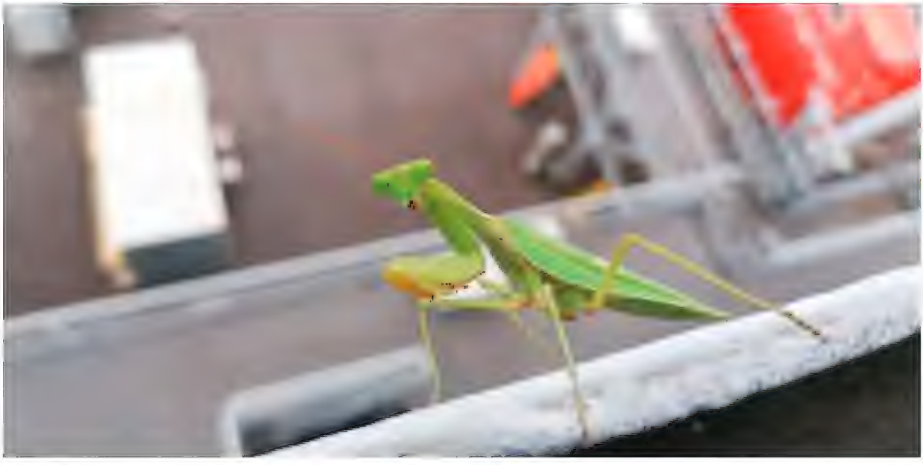

Plate 159. Praying Mantis, at anchor off Cape Verde.

St. Lucia

The first stop of 2023 was to Castries, St. Lucia. This Caribbean Island is something of a tourist hotspot, welcoming thousands of cruise ship passengers during the holiday season. However, I suspect that few tourists are aware of the island's unique flora and fauna, with many beautiful endemic bird species. These included the national bird, the St. Lucia Parrot *Amazona versicolor* which is classed as Vulnerable, but with the population now on the increase. Other birds included the colourful St. Lucia Warbler *Setophaga delicata* and St. Lucia Oriole *Icterus laudabilis*. The highlight was spotting a White-breasted Thrasher *Ramphocinclus brachyurus* in dense undergrowth. This bird species is endemic to St. Lucia and the nearby island of Martinique, and sadly classed as endangered because of the loss of its dry forest scrubland habitat.

Plate 160. Saint Lucia Warbler.

Plate 161. White-breasted Thrasher.

Plate 162. Saint Lucia Oriole.

Plate 163. Rufous-throated Solitaire.

Plate 164. Grey Trembler.

Plate 165. Lesse Antillean Peewee.

As with the other islands, the diversity of reptiles was high on St. Lucia. The beautiful St. Lucia Whiptail Lizard *Cnemidophorus vanzoi* is critically endangered, and now found only on the small offshore islets of Praslin and the Maria Islands[2]. Remarkably, there are talks of linking the Maria Islands to the mainland of St. Lucia via a causeway, which would almost certainly spell the end of these lizards. The Maria Islands are also home to the critically endangered St. Lucia Racer Snake *Erythrolamprus ornatus*, which has been dubbed 'the world's rarest snake' with as few as twenty individuals remaining[3].

Conclusion

In every respect, the past year has been outstanding for HMS *Scott*, with over 45,000 nautical miles steamed and over 200,000 square miles of ocean surveyed. The trip also gave us the opportunity to visit interesting places, learn about their often-unique wildlife, and learn too about the conservation work that is going on in order to preserve the rich biodiversity for future generations. Many of the projects mentioned are worthy of their own in-depth article, and it is hoped the short mentions here will help raise awareness and stimulate the reader to find out more.

Philip Boak
Email: secretary@rnbws.org.uk

[2] https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/CBF56F09A789C628480514E61D8F61DE/S0030605306000937a.pdf/div-class-title-the-st-lucia-whiptail-lizard-span-class-italic-cnemidophorus-vanzoi-span-a-conservation-dilemma-div.pdf

[3] https://www.fauna-flora.org/species/saint-lucia-racer/

Plate 166. Adult female Magnificent Frigatebird off Anguilla. © *T Bingley*

Short report from HMS *Protector*

by Petty Officer (Hydrographic and Meteorology) K Warford

(Photographs by author, except where indicated)

This won't be like other reports from ships because I am a total beginner; but it is a start. I've always had an interest in wildlife and the outdoors; growing up in Lowestoft I spent a lot of time on the Norfolk Broads kayaking, spotting Kingfishers and watching Swallows over the water, or on the beach looking in rock pools for sea creatures. Whilst serving in the survey ship HMS *Echo,* the Operations Officer, Lieutenant Philip Boak, introduced me to the RNBWS. He was very knowledgeable about wildlife, was keen to share it with members of the ship's company and his enthusiasm rubbed off, with several new members joining the Society - one of them being me.

After HMS *Echo* decommissioned, I joined HMS *Protector* in August 2022 in the Caribbean. We visited the islands of Anguilla, Curaçao and Grenada and then went to Montevideo for a short maintenance period before heading for the Antarctic. As I write this in May 2023 we are in Middlesbrough for more maintenance before we deploy again in the autumn.

Our time down south gave the ship's company lots of opportunities to observe wildlife. As we left the Caribbean several Magnificent Frigatebirds *Fregata magnificens* were seen following the ship, swooping at gulls and forcing them to drop their catch of fish which the attackers would then steal, and this kept the bridge team amused during watches. Atlantic Brown Boobies *Sula leucogaster leucogaster* were another source of interest during this part of the passage, with six often circling the ship looking for a place to rest on the main mast and fighting for a perch. They stayed for several days before a live firing practice forced them back to sea.

Plate 167. Atlantic Brown Boobies on the lookout.

Plate 168. Orcas threatening seals near the Lemaire Channel.

During our time in the Antarctic there was of course an abundance of wildlife. A major highlight for all was watching a pod of Orcas *Orchinus orcha* hunting - silently breaking the surface on the lookout for seals resting on ice floes, and then swimming in formation to create waves to tip the floe and wash the seals into the sea. This was a spectacular sight that is rarely witnessed.

Protector had a stop in Port Lockroy to support the scientists staying there studying the penguins. This gave opportunities to get ashore and photograph the local wildlife, including the Pale-faced Sheathbill *Chionis albus*, a bird which was not afraid to get close to the ship's company. There were also many inquisitive penguins, waddling and sliding around watching us as much as we watched them.

Plate 169. Adelie Penguins, Rothera Base.

As I said at the beginning, I am a total newcomer to serious birding, and now regret not having recorded my sightings more methodically. However, I hope that will come in our next deployment south, when I shall hopefully have as my mentor our new First Lieutenant, Lt Cdr Philip Boak!

Kirsty Warford
Email: kirstwarf@yahoo.co.uk

Plate 170. Black-capped Petrel. © *S Copsey*

Black-capped Petrel onboard MV *Queen Victoria*

by Warrant Officer Steve Copsey

From 30 October to 11 November 2022 my wife and I enjoyed a cruise on board MV *Queen Victoria,* and after a visit to the island of Madeira on 3 November, the ship departed for the overnight transit to the Canaries. Next morning, with La Palma visible to starboard I did a sweep of the upper decks, and spotted a decent-sized petrel against the bulkhead behind some reclining chairs. My initial thought was that the bird was either a Fea's Petrel *Pterodroma feae* or Desertas Petrel *P. deserta* - the most likely in that area.

The bird was clearly not happy and was flapping against the bulkhead. I took a couple of shots on the camera, and then managed to pick it up despite it latching on to my fingers a couple of times with its rather sharp bill. Once in my hands the bird started screeching and was getting very agitated. I gave it a quick once over, saw it had no obvious injuries, and duly released the bird over the starboard guard rail. I am happy to report that it flew strongly away from the ship heading back out to sea.

I then sent my images to a couple of friends, one being Simon Cook, a wildlife tour leader and a fellow member of RNBWS. Within a few minutes he replied and said that he thought the bird was a Black-capped Petrel *Pterodroma hasitata*, a species that breeds in the Caribbean and is a rarity on this side of the Atlantic Ocean. He informed me that he would pass the images to a few colleagues and suggested I post the images to a pelagic Facebook page, and this I did. From the responses received it was clear that the bird was indeed a Black-capped Petrel.

I believe this is the 17th record for the Western Palearctic, but because of the bird's pelagic nature it is almost certainly under recorded. My sighting has been accepted as a first for the Canary Islands; as a footnote, I have been rather lucky in the vicinity of the Canary Islands. Back in September 2012 I was sailing past Tenerife in HMS *Protector*, heading for the South Atlantic and Antarctica and was called to the bridge for a bird perched on the foremast. This bird turned out to be another first for the Canary Islands, a Red-footed Booby *Sula sula***.** (Reported in *Sea Swallow* 62: 109).

Steve Copsey
Email: sjcopsey@ntlworld.com

Seabird reports 2022

by Captain Stephen Chapman, MN

In the year 2022 reports of seabirds at sea were received from the following observers, and their observations will be added to the database.

Michael Barritt a cruise on MV *Borealis* from Liverpool to Lerwick and Molde, Norway. Return passage from Hardanger fjord, Norway to Liverpool in July 2022. Michael notes: as should probably be expected, bird life was much sparser in the eastern part of the North Sea with its deeper water and narrow shelf off Norway. There were also not many seabird sightings within the deep fjords - mainly *Laridae*. (As I found too in 2010.) This was an interesting experience, in which my sister kindly took us on our first cruise. I was fascinated to be on the biggest ship I had sailed in since serving in an aircraft carrier as a midshipman over half a century ago!

Malcolm Calvert also reported voyages with Fred Olsen Cruises:

On MV *Balmoral* from Southampton to Funchal, Madeira, Santa Cruz, La Palma, Tenerife, San Sebastian, La Gomera, Las Palmas, Gran Canaria, Lisbon returning to Southampton in December 2011. He recorded 28 species including land birds.

On MV *Borealis* (after initially being storm bound) from Liverpool to Arrecife, Lanzarote, Puerto del Rosario, Fuerteventura, Las Palmas, Gran Canaria, Santa Cruz, Tenerife, San Sebastian, La Gomera, Santa Cruz, La Palma retuning to Liverpool in December 2021. He recorded 29 species including land birds.

Again on MV *Borealis,* in March–April 2022, sailing from Liverpool to Cartagena, Spain, Cagliari, Sardinia, Naples, Civitavecchia, Ajaccio, Corsica, Malaga, La Coruna returning to Liverpool. He recorded 59 species including land birds in a four page report.

Simon Cook back at sea after the COVID-19 pandemic reported on two voyages:

On board MV *Balmoral,* sailing from Dover to Gibraltar, Malta, Croatia, Montenegro, Greece (several places), Turkey, Menorca, Cadiz and returning to Dover, September to October 2022. A detailed four page report on an Excel spreadsheet.

On aboard MV *Island Sky* in the Southern Ocean from Puerto Madryn, Argentina to the Falkland Islands and South Georgia and Antarctic Peninsula, in December 2022. A detailed seven page report on an Excel spreadsheet.

W.O. Steve Copsey cruise on board MV *Queen Victoria* from Southampton to Madeira and the Canaries Islands. About half the time was spent at sea. (See report of Black-capped Petrel *Pterodroma hasitata* opposite).

Please continue sending your records to: data@rnbws.org.uk - thank you.

Some selected seabird highlights from the ornithological press

The following is the usual trawl through press and bird journals that feature seabird distribution news that have crossed my desk in the last year.

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster* new to the British List

The five sightings of Brown Boobies in 2019/20 have been accepted by the British Birds Rarities Committee, *British Birds* 114: 570–628 and are new to the British list. The recording of the five is detailed by Andy Stoddart in *British Birds* 115, 88–94. The paper documents the records, providing some background on the species' distribution, taxonomy and identification and setting these records in the context of increasing vagrancy to Europe. So one to watch out for by sea birders and on Channel Crossings. The images captured were critical in supporting the acceptance of the records

from Swalecliffe, Kent, 19 August 2019; St. Ives, Cornwall, 26–31 August 2019; Kynance Cove, The Lizard, Cornwall, 2–6 September 2019 and at sea, c. 40 km northwest of Cape Cornwall, Cornwall, 2 September 2019. On the same day that the Kynance Cove bird was discovered, a Brown Booby was observed and photographed from MV *Marco Polo*, between about 18.00 and 19.00 when the ship was c. 40 km northwest of Cape Cornwall; the bird circled the vessel for about 30 minutes looking as if it might land on board. The photographs show it to have been an immature bird and yet another individual. Finally a fifth bird also at sea, c. 5 km southeast of Bembridge, Isle of Wight, 9 May 2020. This bird came aboard the Belgian trawler *Jasmine* c. 5 km southeast of Bembridge, Isle of Wight and it stayed on board for several hours.

The precise ageing of the birds proved difficult for the BOURC to assess because the species can breed at almost any time of year. Nevertheless, the Kent bird was judged to be non-juvenile (2CY+), the St. Ives bird probably a second-summer/third-winter (3CY) female, the Kynance Cove bird a first-summer/second-winter (2CY) and the 2019 'at sea' bird either a juvenile (1CY) or first-summer/second-winter (2CY).

Zino's Petrel *Pterodroma madeira* accepted to the British List

Long suspected but at last accepted to the British List was a Zino's Petrel. The sighting and photograph was of one, first-calendar-year bird or older, c. 3.2 km south of Bishop Rock Lighthouse, Isles of Scilly, on 30 July 2020. As noted in ***British Birds*** Report on rare birds in Great Britain in 2021 (*British Birds* 115: 578–9) geolocator tracking has demonstrated that both Zino's and Desertas Petrels can move north from Madeira into the North Atlantic, while Fea's Petrels typically remain closer to the Cape Verde islands (***Birding World*** 24: 216–219, ***Diversity and Distributions*** 23: 794–805). Most years small numbers of *Pterodroma* petrels are seen off Britain and Ireland. Separating these petrels is one of the greatest identification challenges faced by birders and the majority go unidentified. Unidentified birds are suspected to be the more populous Desertas Petrel. However, it has been thought that amongst these a very few Zino's Petrels might also occur. Obtaining good enough views and photographs to separate the two species has long been the challenge. An observation of a bird resembling this taxon from a boat near the Isles of Scilly was therefore not wholly unexpected. Fortunately, the individual was photographed and seen by observers with much experience of all three North Atlantic *Pterodroma* species. Consideration of the bird's slighter structure and smaller bill size, and analysis of its underwing pattern all indicated that this individual was *P. madeira* and not *P. deserta* or *P. feae.*

Zino's Petrel breeds on Madeira in the Atlantic, with birds dispersing south to St. Helena and off north-east Brazil, and north to waters south-west of Ireland. (See report in this issue, p.13)

More New Zealand Storm Petrels *Fregetta maoriana* off Gau Island, Fiji

The observers undertook an eight-day pelagic expedition (25 May–1 June 2022) to observe tubenoses off Gau, Fiji on the 18 metre SY *Sauvage,* documenting the sighting of four New Zealand Storm Petrels *Fregetta maoriana* off Gau Island, Fiji. These sightings are significant as they are only the second confirmed records of New Zealand Storm Petrel away from New Zealand / Australasia. They provide further evidence of long-distance dispersal or migration. Fiji is c. 2,000 km north of New Zealand. Robert L. Flood, Mike Danzenbaker, Philip M. Hansbro, Colin Rogers, Hiroyuki Tanoi & Shoko Tanoi. *Bull BOC* 142(3): 380–382.

The dark-morph Herald Petrel *Pterodroma heraldica*

Whether dark-morph Herald Petrel *Pterodroma heraldica* exists or not has been debated for many years. This paper summarises previous contributions on the subject, provides indisputable evidence of the dark morph, describes its plumage based on museum specimens and live birds, highlights differences between dark, light and intermediate morphs, and enumerates characters that relatively easily separate the dark morph from 'all-dark' Henderson Petrel *P. atrata*. Dark-morph Herald Petrel is scarce and local. Since the 1970s, records have been restricted to the central South Pacific at Mangareva Island (Gambier Islands) and Ua

Pou (Marquesas Islands). Robert L. Flood, Kirk Zufelt, Mike Danzenbaker, Shoko Tanoi, Vincent Bretagnolle & Hadoram Shirihai *Bull BOC* 142(3): 354–365.

Pelagic birds around Rapa and Marotiri, French Polynesia

Pelagic observations from around Rapa Island and Marotiri Rocks, in the Austral Islands, French Polynesia, made during the first dedicated at-sea survey of birds in the region, during October–December 2019 are reported. The authors recommend that the regional occurrence of several seabird species be modified and that the list of avifauna for Rapa and Marotiri, the Austral Islands, and East Polynesia variously be amended to include Juan Fernández Petrel *Pterodroma externa*, Mottled Petrel *P. inexpectata*, Gould's Petrel *P. leucoptera*, Stejneger's Petrel *P. longirostris*, Buller's Shearwater *Ardenna bulleri* and Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*. Two Gould's Petrels were behaving as if breeding, and the timing of egg laying by Christmas Shearwater *Puffinus nativitatis* is apparently somewhat earlier than the species' other populations. Polynesian Storm Petrel *Nesofregetta fuliginosa* was found foraging in large numbers around Marotiri suggesting a hitherto unrecognised and perhaps significant breeding population; also large numbers around Rapa. Titan Storm Petrel *Fregetta (gallaria) titan* foraged off Rapa in substantial numbers and c. 5% appeared to be a variant, raising the possibility of two distinctive phenotypes. At-sea images and a field description of 'classic' Rapa Shearwater *Puffinus myrtae*, and a report of an unidentified small *Puffinus* seen at Marotiri are included. As they say, the survey adds significant new information to the knowledge of seabirds in this region, and in combination with previous work argue strongly for the conservation of Rapa, Marotiri and the surrounding ocean's pelagic birds. This is all supported by stunning photographs.

Robert L. Flood, Kirk Zufelt, Vincent Bretagnolle & Hadoram Shirihai *Bull BOC* 141(4): 387–411.

First confirmed record of Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus* for São Tomé

Lionel Sineux *ABC* Mar 2022 v29.1: 96.

First record of Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus* for Benin

Johannes Merz *ABC* Sept 2022 v29.2: 232–23.

Stephen Chapman
Email: data@rnbws.org.uk

Obituary - Tom Gullick

by Keith Betton, David Dobson
& Chris Storey, Chairman British Ornithologists' Club

Plate 171. Tom Gullick, David Dobson and Michael Casement, Spain 2013. © *M Casement*

Tom Gullick, the first person to record 9,000 birds back in 2012, and professionally one of the giants of the travel industry, passed away peacefully on 27 June at his home in Spain, aged 92.

After Naval service he founded Clarksons Tours in 1963, later becoming Clarksons Holidays, and built it into Britain's largest tour operator by 1970. He resigned when the company merged with Court Line in 1972. Having moved to Spain, near Ciudad Real, he organised partridge shoots, later swapping guns for cameras as he led birdwatching tours not only in Spain but also in Morocco and elsewhere.

Keith Betton
Email: keithbetton@hotmail.com

Tom Gullick was an extraordinary man, and he was still full of vigour when Michael Casement and I spent a long weekend with him in January 2013 (recorded in *Sea Swallow* 62: 73). However, he does not figure in RNBWS history, except at the very beginning, when as a Cadet at Dartmouth he wrote a very comprehensive report of the birds in and around the Naval College, a report that included a statement recording the good news of the foundation of the Royal Naval Birdwatching Society.

The rest of his short naval career was colourful. He got into trouble for having his pet spaniel on board his submarine off Scotland and was shortly after drummed out of the submarine service for illegally shooting the local laird's pheasants. He was then sent as Flag Lieutenant to the CinC Home Fleet (a plum job, so Their Lordships knew they had a good'un, in spite of his misdemeanours), but when the fleet moved en masse to the Mediterranean in 1956 for the Suez operation, leaving just a depot ship and a tug behind, he decided to quit, seeing out his time taking an Inshore Minesweeper out to Hong Kong.

Tom's dedication to the pursuit of birds verged on the obsessive. "Yes, I've had three wives" he said in answer to my question, "but they all gave up on me". I wasn't entirely surprised, given his relentlessness.

I believe Tom Gullick has now been overtaken as the overall champion in the number of bird species seen. Total numbers aren't everyone's idea of birding, but nevertheless Tom Gullick deserves to be remembered.

David Dobson
Email: editor@rnbws.org.uk

I was a fairly frequent traveller with Tom, birding with him first in Spain in 2000, and then on further trips to Morocco, Spain again and the Pyrenees. Each trip followed a strict routine: dedicated birding throughout the day; lunch at a table, with folding chairs and invariably bottled white asparagus, tinned sardines, local bread and wine, plus a shot or two of Fundador. On the afternoon drive Tom smoked a Cuban cigar which he claimed countered the effects of the wine and brandy. Each day ended with delicious food and drink and the bird list.

Chris Storey
Email: c.storey1@btinternet.com

USEFUL ADDRESSES

RNBWS UK representatives:

BRNC Dartmouth. Dr Richard Porter. BRNC Dartmouth Devon. TQ6 0HJ.
Phone: 01803 837233. **Email:** rrrporter@btinternet.com

Portsmouth Area: Lt Cdr BF Witts OBE FRGS RN. Oakwood, Duffield Lane, Woodmancote, Emsworth, Hants PO10 8PZ. **Phone:** 01243 371497

Portland: Martin Cade, Portland Bird Observatory, Old Lower Light, Portland Dorset. DT5 2JT.
Phone: 01305 820553 (Daytime only). **Email:** obs@btinternet.com

RNBWS Overseas representatives:

Australia. Neil Cheshire. The Loft, 7 Hodge Avenue, Encounter Bay, South Australia, Australia.
Phone: 61885527904. **Email:** diomedea1@bigpond.com

Cyprus. Colin Richardson. Petravounos10, Marathounta 8520, Paphos, Cyprus.
Phone: 00357 99157838. **Email:** richar@cytanet.com.cy

Falkland Islands. Commander C Moorey OBE RN. Falkland Islands Maritime Authority, Old Design Office, Ross Road, Port Stanley, Falkland Islands.
Email: cmoorey@sec-gov.fk

Gibraltar. Keith Bensusan. GONHS, PO Box 843, Gibraltar.
Email: bensusan@gonhs.org

Hong Kong. Geoff Welch. Flat 23A, Block 25, South Horizons, Ap Lei Chau, Hong Kong.
Email: geoffwelch46@yahoo.co.uk

India Praveen J. B303 Shriram Spurthi, ITPL Main Road, Brookefields, Bangalore 560037, India.
Email: paintedstork@gmail.com

Madeira. Frank Zino. Avenido do infante 26, Rez-do-chao 'C' 9000, Funchal, Madeira.
Phone: 00351291 763292. **Email:** fzino@netmadeira.com

Seychelles. Adrian Skerrett. Hazeley Brook, Keele Road, Keele, Staffs ST5 5AL.
Phone: 01782 751605. **Email:** askerrett@hotmail.com

USA. Dr Rachael Orben, Oregon State University, Hatfield Marine Sciences Center, 2030 SE Marine Science Drive, Newport, Oregon 97365, USA.
Email: rachael.orben@oregonstate.edu

Plate 172. Greater Flamingos, with the World Trade Centre, Bahrain, in the background, March 2022. © *J Crowe*